

The Road Home

by HeavyHorses

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Summary: Four strangers embark on a journey to find their way back home. Challenges will arouse to put them to the test and change their lives in ways they've never imagined before. Nuff said.

1. Away From Home

_Author's note: I take claim of nothing ye hear! The characters herein belong to Disney/Pixar, DreamWorks, William Joyce, Cressida Cowell and all the other respective owners. _

Big thanks for making me check twice after posting here and to my sister for some casual ideas and for knocking my noggin' around so I'd sit down and write this down.

* * *

><p>February 5th 2014 - 21:36 - Twenty two hours before the match

Jack chuckled at his friends laughing and singing. To be flying in first class for a little match in England only made the mood grow more. Who'd have thought that a bunch of teens would travel to Europe just to play ice hockey at the Russian Olympics anyway?

"We'll make those brits know what real pain is, am I right guys?" A boy yelled from the back.

"Yeah, they'll never see it coming!" Another one replied gleefully while the rest of the team raised their drinks. Jack raised his hockey stick along with a quiet yet warm laugh. The '_staff_' as everyone called it. They said he made magic with it, and funnily enough, he often believed that too.

"No team is match for the Burgess Fucking Winter Wolves!" The group boomed loudly. "Yeah, not while we have the Jack Fucking Winter Frost with us!" Another cheer thundered across.

He couldn't hide his smirk at that title; he'd never tried to. Jack sank deeper into his seat and set his mind loose to drift away looking around while the rest of the team began to sing again, the smile growing wider. Three years ago he got into the local team as a complete nobody and slowly made his way up till he became the best one around. He was a natural, but never bragged about it. He just wanted to have fun, and he always had it.

When he peeked through the window he felt like being in the middle of a dream. It was night, there were no clouds around and hundreds of glimmering stars completed the sky. He tried looking down into the ocean but he saw nothing but darkness. Then his eyes widened when something else caught his attention. Something not so different from the stars yet somewhat greater and more beautiful reflected in his blue eyes. The greatest full moon he had ever seen hung in the middle of the night sky. It was so big and it was so bright. The stars were but mere lanterns against it. This was a light he'd never seen before. The longer he stared the bigger it got, and he felt submerged in that light. A warmth he'd never sensed before touched his very centre. Alas, the warmth disappeared as the captain announced that they were going to land soon.

And when they did, the light vanished as well. And the dream ended.

As soon as he got outside the plane, he noticed it.

The moon shone over the asphalt floor as the team slowly walked out of the plane. Jack's brow furrowed as he looked around searching; there was nobody outside. No workers or guards or even friendly faces waiting for their arrival. Not even a single soul was there.

"Something's upâ€¦!" The words were just a whisper in the cold night, he wasn't even sure if he had said those words.

He shifted his bag over his shoulder and began to slowly lead the group inside the airport, stopping in front of the large doors and tightening the grip on his stick unconsciously. It felt like hours had passed between the landing and now. When he finally opened them, a horrid crescendo of hundreds and hundreds of terrified shouts stunned the boy.

It was chaos. The lights were out, the once warm rays of the moon now felt cold and grim. It was a maze of people in complete desperation, screaming and crying, crawling and running under the dim lights. They were only but mere dark blurs in Jack's eyes, just as ghosts in a nightmare. Little by little, the light revealed someone: a little girl standing motionless in complete shock, just like him. They locked eyes for an eternity, then a sudden mob appeared from the darkness and she was gone. What was happening? If she screamed he couldn't hear it, there was too much noise. His heart froze, his brain was screaming at him to move, to run. But his legs didn't respond.

Thank God somebody grabbed his shoulder from behind and pulled him back into reality.

But when the grip turned to pain he reacted and glanced back. Jack

found that he was alone; his friends weren't behind him anymore. Tracking the dark hand that clenched the flesh of his shoulder he found him.

No, it couldn't be _a him. _It couldn't be human. It wasn't alive.

The white eyes staring at him lacked any sign of life. The light of the moon slowly revealed the torn clothes and rotten skin. A low moan escaped that mouth, filling the air with the stench of death. It sent shivers down his spine, and at that moment somehow he felt in control of himself again; felt the stick in his hand, and knew what he had to do. He didn't hear the hit, but he knew-felt that it was doing it. And he did it again. And again. And again. And again. He closed his eyes as his arm kept moving, and then felt that it wasn't standing there anymore. It was probably lying on the floor deadâ€”or whatever it was now.

When he opened his eyes breathing deep pants he found the body on the ground just as he thought, but when he noticed the pool surrounding it realization hit him. That was blood, rotten blood by the stench of it, and it wasn't just on the floor with that thing; there were stains all over his stick, his hands and his clothes. He just stared at it in shock, to take a life was something he never even imagined doing. But that wasn't alive, he didn't _kill_ it, it was already dead. His mind began to spin along with his stomach before he fell to the ground on his knees, his hands never dropping the weapon, and fought the sick feeling rising inside. He had to leave this hellhole.

He looked around for a way out, an exit, an escape. He saw blurry figures engulfed in darkness again. And then, for the second time, the fragile light of the moon shone through the large windows showing him the way.

He got on his feet trembling, the air feeling heavier and thicker, and dashed forward, dodging and bumping whatever things were in his way, and broke the crystal in a shout.

But even though his legs kept running, the noise never faded away. The screams were still there; inside his mind and on the streets. Those eyes were still there, haunting him. It didn't matter anymore, he just kept running.

He didn't look back.

* * *

><p>February 7th 2014 - 14:42 - Two days after official announcement

Looking back around her shoulder she found nothing but snow, the sky was grey and the freezing gust was unbearable. She had never been this cold in all of her life. Her tore coat did a poor job at maintaining the heat and the snowstorm was too much for her; struggling was pointless.

Memories flooded her mind as she dropped to the frozen floor. The snow covering the streets slowly reached her knees that were held close to her chest shaking, her blonde hair covering her shoulders

and back.

When Rapunzel saw the news on TV she didn't believe it. It was like in the movies. She stared at the screen in disbelief until reality hit her and the mug in her hand fell: Flynn hadn't returned. He was supposed to be back already. He was outside In the middle of the chaos. This shouldn't be happening. They were on a small trip for crying out loud.

Her heart pounded with the strength of a hammer when fear began to grow. She shook her head not even daring to think the worst. It didn't matter what he'd say, she wouldn't stay there doing nothing.

There was no time. She put on her coat and placed Pascal on her pocket before hurrying outside their room. Her braid began to loosen as she almost tripped dashing down the stairs, blonde locks flying behind her before she hastily opened the door to the entrance room.

The lounge which was usually full with tourists and groups and couples laughing and chatting about their everyday lives was completely empty. The windows were broken, the large curtains tore apart and the floor was full of blood-Oh gosh there was so much blood-Rapunzel tried to avoid it and carefully made her way outside. She couldn't even look at it. The feeling rising through her throat was as awful as the smell of the entire room.

She didn't notice her bare feet until a chill ran down her spine when she stepped outside. She forgot to wear her shoes again. She always did. Mother never objected about that anyway, her home was always warm and cosy. But now it was cold, and without realizing it she was in the middle of the havoc, fighting through the crowd to find him.

Her green eyes widened at the giant painting: buildings on fire, people breaking into stores, cars blowing up, hundreds of undead chasing people at horrid speed, police officers barely holding off both the panicked crowd and the infected, dead bodies over the snow. The image was as horrible as it was surreal.

And then she saw him.

It all happened too fast. The fright in Flynn's eyes when they met hers, the way they shouted their names, their hands reaching out in desperation, the unbearably vast distance between them, the incessant struggle, the sirens, the undead, the crowd splitting in two, the rising fear turning into panic, her heart in her throat when she found him again, his screams of pain, the moans of them, all the tainted snowâ€¦

A strong gust blew wild in the blizzard throwing her into the present. She didn't cry; tears had run out long ago. Her closed eyes were pressed tightly against her knees as the pain and hunger overwhelmed her numb body. Pascal was shaking inside her pocket. She couldn't feel her hands or her feet anymore. This was it. At least she was with a friend.

She opened her eyes barely to take in the scenery for one last time. It was all white; the hail filled the air and the ground. The only

sound was the roar of the wind. But in all that, she noticed something else. Her eyes recognised a dark shape at the distance. With what little strength was left, she struggled up to her feet to get a better look, that little spark of hope barely alive in her chest, but it was pointless. Maybe it was one of those things, maybe she was meant to be like that, like one of them. Shutting her eyes again, Rapunzel apologised to her mother for one last time with a whisper before her will gave up and she passed out dropping on the floor.

She didn't feel being wrapped around arms that lifted her off the street. She didn't feel the movements or the shadow's voice in the raging white.

* * *

><p>April 12th 2014 - 18:30 - Roughly a week after Military Containment Plan's fourth attempt

Those things weren't supposed to be so bloody fast anyway.

And even though Angus had outrun them with ease, she knew she couldn't be riding him all night long. They both needed rest. The horse was lucky actually, being able to eat grass and all that. Merida on the other hand had to hunt something down or find a town soon, heck even a bird would do. Who knows, maybe she'd sneak up on one of those bandit camps scattered over the road, or with her luck a rescue party would be able to find her and take her to one of those refugee areas... or maybe Angus would sprout wings and fly to France to greet her family for a cup of tea.

Her face betrayed a sad smile at the memory of them. It had been months, but they should be alright. She was glad she'd been able to phone them when the news reached the house before the lines and satellites were out. They were in a type of underground bunker hidden in the European Committee, and assured her that they were completely safe. Unfortunately they couldn't travel back home until the situation was under control. And if something went wrong down there, she told herself there was nothing to worry about. Dad knew how to survive and she trusted Mum to take the right decisions, more so after the 'incident' a couple of years back; even the triplets could handle themselves now that they'd grown up a wee bit. They'd protect each other just as they've done before.

The setting sun over the west was unhurriedly darkening the land and turning the skies red. The rocking pines and green grass completed the picture with the horse slowly making its way along the path with steady and sound paces.

Due to past events, they've been avoiding the main roads. The woods had always been her second home, and now her current one. It took less than two months for all the supplies to run out. Then, with her dad's personal hunting armoury, she formed search parties to find food and survivors. A couple of weeks after there were almost a hundred refugees working together.

Alas, the worst had to arouse sooner or later.

Maybe it had been her fault; she was too tired and hungry to personally check for injuries that time. She only remembered flashes

about it all now. Why someone would lie about that was still something her brain didn't understand but she felt sorry for that poor lad and all the lives lost. The few survivors left panicked and ran away, leaving the lass all alone with nothing left but rotting corpses and walking dead in the Main Hall. Luckily Angus was still with her.

And even if she enjoyed her privacy, the manor had been her home for her entire life—and for every DunBroch for that matter—nonetheless Merida knew that staying there was pointless, especially now that it was no longer impenetrable. So with bow in hand and her dad's personal rifle at her back she rode away. At first she went to the nearby cities and towns getting food amongst other supplies and camping in the wilderness with Angus; Mum would object at that of course, but it was her choice. Some weeks after a not so friendly encounter occurred with some scavengers, in which she regrettably exchanged the gun for food that lasted less than she had hoped for. Now they were making their way south to rack up yet again.

In truth, she didn't know what to do in the long run

A thin black column caught her attention while she was staring at the skies, the red now turning to a shade of blue. Maybe he would sprout wings after all; the camp couldn't be too far. Without hesitation she dismounted the horse and they walked towards the rising smoke.

Angus knew to stay hidden when they caught sight of the fire a few meters away, she had done this before and it was for the better to stay out of harm's way.

Hiding behind a tree with an arrow ready in her bow, Merida's sharp cerulean eyes scanned the camp. There was no one at the clearing. With the scent of smoke and burnt meat filling her lungs she reached the fire, logs and rocks placed around probably as seats, and her stomach rumbled at the sight of a couple of clumsily cooked bunnies ready for dinner. Her legs betrayed her and she stumbled to the ground, landing on her knees. She pulled her hood off revealing the wild mop of red curls before quick hands grabbed the sticks instinctively and she stuffed her gob like old times. If only Mum were here, she'd probably give her a lecture about being—

"Hey! That girl is eatin' up our food!" A voice sounded from behind. Three figures approached from the west, their faces dark. What was left of the sun's light behind them turned their shapes in mere shadows.

"Hey mate, ain't that the same bitch from last time?" More bandits again—Looks like they've lost some men too- Wait, why wasn't she moving?

"Well I'll be damned, guess we have to teach—"

The arrow pierced right in his left arm and he tumbled to the ground groaning, cursed hunger.

The remaining two hastily surrounded her as she readied another arrow. This time it struck right in the left one's chest while the other ran at her with a blade.

Barely dodging the blow she threw him off balance with a knee in the gut and a hard bow on his back before beginning to create some distance for one last shot.

"You're a fiery one eh twat?" A forth one came up from behind and grabbed her by the arms, the grip growing painfully as she struggled groaning. The other one got up and laughed quietly at the sight between heavy pants before walking towards her, flashes of reflected fire coming from the new dirty blade in the young night.

Then she saw the one with the arrow in his arm standing at the distance and pointing a rifle at her, fighting to maintain a steady arm. Now there were three pissed off crooks after her, two of them armed.

"Och sod yeh!" She cussed and stomped the fourth's foot so hard it hurt her own ankle. Fortunately she reacted faster than everyone else. The shot boomed through the air as Merida threw herself to the ground, blissfully avoiding the bullet. She gripped her bow tightly and reached to grab another arrow, but they were scattered around thanks to all the rolling and dodging.

A neigh echoed through the woods and to her surprise, her horse was stomping the back of the gunner mercilessly; she'd thank him later for not being the baby he usually was. Shoving the bandit aside with another hard swing of her bow she turned and grabbed an arrow as the other charged with the blade. In a flash of a second he dropped it and fell soundly, flooding the ground in blood with an arrow sticking out of his neck. Suddenly another scream caught her attention and her eyes widened.

The runners again, the noise of the rifle lured them here. That's why she used arrows in the first place. Angus hurried over to her neighing in worry while the gunner slowly stood up between curses and coughs. Merida managed to get some arrows back before the man readied the rifle and aimed, only to miss the shot as an avalanche of death ran over him.

There was no time, she slung her bow around her shoulder and climbed back on her horse before taking off with a trail of runners dashing after them. As they were leaving the glade, she felt a jerk at her side. Looking over she recognized the bandit from last time gripping the saddle and trying to throw her of the horse. Between kicks and punches they struggled for what felt like an eternity, the Clydesdale galloping in the night through bushes and jumping logs.

Thunders roared across the sky announcing the impending storm. There were now infected at both sides, running using both hands and legs like beasts. They pushed the horse off the path while trying to get the bandit and the rider, scratching her left leg in the process. One hand was clutching the reins while she tried to defend herself with the other. For a moment she became too focused on the infected that she didn't notice the man grabbing a thick branch. With a hard swing and a worst hit her head began spinning. The lass fell and rolled down a hill into the darkness losing consciousness.

* * *

><p>April 13th 2014 - 06:47 - Fourth day of the journey

Dawn.

The docks were empty.

He stretched his arms trying to suppress the marooned feeling again and the sighs that came along with it, leather creaking with the slothful movements. It wasn't loss of hope, he was too stubborn to give up, even after his twelfth... no, thirteenth attempt to find a way back.

The sound of the waves filled his ears along with the morning breeze, that and the black furry beast breathing at his side. It was just like being there again, but lacked everything that made it his. The shimmering waves reflecting the blue sky announced the arrival of the upcoming sun.

He didn't remember the last time he'd seen it, in fact he didn't recall seeing one at all.

Sunsets though, sunsets were a complete different thing. He remembered most of them to say the least.

Such a charming view...

And even if he didn't remember the first time he'd seen one, he knew that it had happened at home, alongside his family, when he still had the two of them.

He did remember watching it alone, waiting by the entrance of the field, in his room studying and re-reading books to escape reality before a sleepless night, walking by the cliffs near the docks when everybody else was hurrying away.

Then the other times flashed through his mind. When he still had his leg, working with Gobber in the garage till midnight, walking Toothless near the woodsâ€¦

It was funny really, to be thinking about the ending when it was just the beginning.

And he imagined how his first time would be. It wouldn't be now, it wouldn't be here. His green eyes caught a small flash of gold over the horizon.

It truly would be a sight to behold.

So he closed them and waited; waited for that delicate moment to pass. He wanted to witness it again where it mattered. He spied the scent of the sea, the air, the sand and the salt; spied the sound of the zephyr, of Toothless, the waves and the passing time.

But time was something completely different now.

There was nothing but fog behind them, swarming with riddles and uncertainties of the past, the memories of those who were and weren't, all the wrong decisions he'd taken. And he felt a slight shiver from the cold, the same one he'd felt since the very beginning of all this-a remainder that he would never forget. The weight of the skies became heavier over his shoulders; the sound became noise as

fear and longing began to grow back again.

Then a warmth rose from underneath, and the fog began to clear.

It rose from his feet to his legs and to his stomach. His chest rose when light stabbed it and filled his lungs with morning air. Then the lump in his throat faded with every new breath, his lips weren't dry anymore and the numbness finally left him as the sun touched his face.

And he finally greeted the whole star hovering over the horizon.

The bark of his friend reminded him of their endeavour and he patted its head with a chuckle, greenish eyes meeting his. He took a more careful look at the abandoned docks before walking towards a black bike leaning by a streetlamp and grabbed the open bag resting over the seat.

From it he took a map, a compass and a pencil. He sighed marking the place they were in with a cross and began to draw a route heading south over some roads and cities, then he circled the dots representing London and Folkestone. There were a lot more crosses in the northern-west side of the island. Now that there were no planes and no boats, it wouldn't be such an easy task.

It never was. But they had to try.

Toothless nudged his side with a low snuffle, waving its tail and tilting its head, as if knowing what was going on inside his mind and wanting to give his friend confidence.

"Hey, it's okay," He reassured with a smile and looked over to the sea again. It would take weeks, maybe more to get to the capital itself. "Looks like it's the long road for usâ€¦" He trailed off putting his things back in the bag and shifting it over his shoulders.

He picked up his helmet from the ground and mounted the bike starting the engine; Toothless hopped on behind him as he fastened his jacket and secured the straps of its collar. Placing his prosthetic in the pedal with the usual metallic sound, the bike roared and the soft breeze soon became gust.

They were nothing but distant blurs down the road now. The bike at full speed never stopped sounding so familiar in his ears, a remainder that he always found a way out, no matter how crazy it was.

And as the earth below felt like air and the wind rushed past them, he couldn't help but smile at the thought, ironic as it was.

The road back home always felt shorter.

2. Strangers and Rash Actions

(Author's note: I should've posted the first one in January. Oh well... perks of using the cafÃ©'s WIFI I guess.)

_Funny thing, I've never seen a complete sunrise or sunset in my

entire life. But it's really not that bad considering I'm still young. Perhaps I'll get a chance in the near future. Who knows, maybe I'll get up at 5 o'clock tomorrow morning to catch a bus and drag my drifting body to the nearest east coast so I can shift my jacket over a shoulder in complete awe. No sweet motorcycle or dog though, God forbid she'd want to get up and accompany me at that hour._

What was that? You were expecting some tidings regarding this second episode? -Well ye can think again laddie!-

P.D.: Don't worry. I will write something down... eventually.)

* * *

><p>Spring - Probably April - A couple of hours past noon

The streets below her were deserted, not a soul around. It was going to rain soon. Light still peered through the grey sky and the flowing Thames soaked the air with its smell. It reminded her of the scent of the loch, although lacked the forest surrounding it and the blue skies above.

Someway watching the dancing flames was distraction enough to keep the longing away. She finished her bird and glanced down from the roof again, searching for a flash of movement or a sound of other survivors. It was odd, not even runners were looming about. The streets were empty, except for wrecked cars blocking some roads, and plenty of buildings with windows and doors boarded up.

She should be considering herself lucky really, to be able to get this far south without other major problems, even if that meant getting here walking. She still had a hard time getting over the fact that Angus was gone, but she wasn't one to cry. Even if meant losing her horse and companion, her only real friend who always was up for a ride when she slipped out of the house at nights after some childish argument with herâ€œ

"Damn it..." She whispered in a shallow breath when the feeling returned. She missed them, she missed them so much. Now she was fighting to keep back tears again. Her mother's once boring lectures rang in her ears, and she stood up straightening her posture and kept a steady gaze over the distant palace, a breeze rocking her curls gently.

Tears never came, she wouldn't let that happen.

They were alright.

A couple of noises from below caught her attention and she peeked over the edge to find the source, the bow steady and ready. Two figures were running down the streets hurriedly, a blonde girl and probably a boy in a blue hoodie, both teens just like her. Then she heard some shots at the distance and noticed another slightly larger group running towards them a couple of blocks away, cursing and yelling. It wasn't hard to realize what was going on, the couple surely stole something from them and now were running for their lives. She could interrupt the chase now and there and help those poor lads or just live and let die acting as if nothing had ever happened; yeah right, like she'd do that anytime soon.

She shot an arrow with a confident smile. It stuck on the street a couple of meters ahead from the fugitives and got the desired effect; they both looked up in surprise and found her in mere seconds. She whistled and motioned to go around the building, the teens looked at each other puzzled before rushing over the nearby alleyway. They still had time; the chasers were far but still a threat, so she quickly got a rope from her bag and tied it to an air pipe before tossing the other end to the side where the teens presumably were.

The first one to come up was the girl; and now that they were close, she got a better look at her. The lass had green eyes and long blonde hair tied in a thick braid, she was wearing a light brown capris that surprisingly weren't ripped and a pink shirt, her face held an expression of both fear and gratitude as she dropped her back on the roof panting and clutching a satchel for dear life, they must have stolen something really important.

Seconds after the boy made it up; he wore brown jeans and the hoodie she'd noticed earlier. He was tightly gripping what looked like a hockey stick in poor shape wrapped with duct tape. He glanced down the streets between stifled huffs at the group below until they were out of sight and sound's reach before tumbling down in relief next to his companion, between puffs he pulled off his hoodie revealing blue eyes and white hair? Surely that wasn't natural. This was the strangest lad she'd ever seen so far, although it was nothing compared to the blue tattoos of Macintosh, those were just plain ridiculous.

A satisfied grin was plastered across her face as she sat and watched the two in silence until they were breathing normally again. They didn't seem like such a treat to her yet, if anything she could take them down without much effort, but she shook those thoughts aside. The pair looked at each other and began to chortle; it was the rush of adrenaline, she knew that very well. Slowly sitting up the girl was the first to speak.

"_Danke fÃ¼r alles..._" She didn't recognize the accent at first; her German was still rusty, or more like the wee bits she'd learned were more than rusty by now. Mum's scowl appeared again and she shrugged. The boy elbowed her lightly on the arm with a chuckle before the blonde got the point.

"Oh," She laughed quietly. "I mean... thanks for everything."

"No problem." She simply nodded back at the two.

"Yeah, although I think we really wouldn't be goners by now, those guys weren't too bright anyway." He was American, she could tell right away. "Say... forgot you were in here for a second there Punzie?"

"_Sorry_, guess I'm a little bit jumpy..."

"Well, seeing as you saved ours back there," The boy reached his hand. "I'm Jack, blondie here is Rapunzel."

"Merida," She shook it eagerly. "Nice to meet yeh."

Jack chuckled. "Let me guess, Ireland right?" She narrowed her eyes, the eagerness slowly fading. "And here I thought I'd never meet some friendly brits aroundâ€"

"Oi, Ah'm from the Highlands laddie!"

"Alright, alright, gotcha..." He still had his smirk as held up his hands apologetically, knowing full well what he'd hit. "...some temper huh?" Jack mumbled to Rapunzel. He was lucky she just shot him daggers with her eyes and not actual arrows. Then something else seemed to cross his mind when he glanced down, his grin turning into a mischievous one.

"Looks like this troublemaker is safe now," He took a wee green reptile from a pocket of his hoodie and placed it on Rapunzel's shoulder.

"Pascal, you're okay!" She squealed stroked and held it in her hands beaming before she looked closely and frowned. "You crazy chameleon, you scared me back there. You're okay right? No cuts or lumps or bruises?" A shook of its head and a smile was the answer. She wasn't sure if chameleons could smile or not but went along with it. Rapunzel seemed to notice the way she was staring at the lizard and the smile returned to her features. "Hey, this is our new friend Merida. Merida, this is Pascal." He tilted his head inquisitively and she hesitated for a second before petting it.

It squeaked and smiled. "Aww hello ye wee thing." It was cute, even if she wasn't a big reptile fan.

"Yeah... you should've seen him down there," Jack snickered and walked by the edge looking at the distance waving his stick around. That lad had a good balance to stroll around like that at this height; or maybe he was just careless. She resolved on the last. "Those guys never saw him coming."

"Don't ever do that again you hear..." The blonde kept her scowl in a low voice receiving nods and shakes along other gestures in reply. Was this how she looked when she talked to Angus?

"Wha' happened down there anyway?"

"The usual... group of survivors, shenanigans, saying we're too young, problems with supplies, arguing about Pascal, threats and whatnot, sneaking out and escaping with some of their things while running for our lives... everyday stuff." He finished twirling his stick on his side.

"Pascal?"

"...They wanted to have him for lunch. Those sickos..." He trailed off, anger filling his eyes. That sounded bad, having to do that to a pet, especially a close one, and she shivered imagining her horse in that circumstance.

"That's just plain wrong..." She didn't know what else to say, the words had just left her out of the shudder.

"Yeah, I mean what's up with that!? We were justâ€"

"Jack..." Rapunzel cut in with a knowing smile before turning to gaze the horizon, a curtain of grey covering the silent city. She looked like lost in thought as she stood up. "Merida, would it be alright if... you know... we stick around with you... I mean... for a while... I guess?" Her green eyes looked full of hope but also doubt and worry, probably for ending up alone. She knew that feeling too well, being out there was something else, especially when things were like this.

"H-Hold on Punz... you-are you sure? I mean, yeah she's helped us, but what ifâ€œ"

"Spare me the lecture Jackson. And if I remember correctly, you were the one that decided to help a complete stranger before, didn't you?" She teased smiling fondly at him and he huffed looking away. Something told her that these two had been through quite a tad lately. She'd like to hear the full story someday.

"That was different then, but we hardly know her..." He tried to keep going, really, but who could compete against those puppy green eyes begging at him. She laughed inwardly at the sight.

Thinking about it now, it would be good to have company, even if that meant having that lad Jack around. Maybe she could use him as target practice someday. Besides it's been a long time since she'd talked to someone else.

"Alright... Ah suppose." She simply said and shrugged with a smile. Rapunzel's face lit up with a gasp of wonder and hugged her, taking her by surprise. "_Entschuldige..." She mumbled letting go before realization dawned upon her and apologised with a small smile. "I mean... sorry... again."

That last line made her laugh, and soon they were both chortling out loud. The blonde was quite warm-hearted, she'd give her that. It's been a while since she laughed like that, and she liked feeling it again. Maybe it was the way she mumbled or her random shows of affection, but she was quickly growing fond of this Rapunzel lass.

The now familiar but still dreaded sound ran through the air down the streets. They weren't safe there anymore. With one quick look between them they started to pack up and took off from the roof towards south, the horde now becoming more than a just blur at the distance. She truly had forgotten about the infected when the pair showed up, and now she was muttering like her mother again for doing so, although she didn't regret helping the pair.

The moans and screams grew larger by the second and they were running out of rooftops. The infected traced them, and now a few were starting to climb buildings.

"Weren't zombies supposed to be slow and dumb and all that?!" Jack shouted after jumping to a nearby building. There were no more roofs they could use, only a set of stairs leading to the streets. It was the lesser evil, considering they were getting cornered and the only building close was a gas station across the large street. Luckily they weren't so far up and nothing happened on their way down. The place wasn't so far as it had looked.

They were running from a larger mass now that they were on the same level, and a couple managed to catch up to them. A quick bow to the face did the job on one. "It looks lik' they've evolved somehow, they're faster than before"

"You don't sayâ€" Jack scoffed hitting another one with his stick, the head sending rotten meat and blood flying across the ground with a too disgusting sound.

"Look out!" Rapunzel yelled and grabbed their arms stopping them as a large one vomited a giant puddle of green bile in front of them.

"Where teh now?"

"Quick! This way!" The blonde leaded them round a group of slow ones and headed for the station. All the windows were boarded up as well as the door, which surprisingly took just a couple of kicks to open.

Once inside, she kept the door closed with the help of Jack while looking around for anything to block it down again.

Rapunzel did the job with a chair, and the three of them slowly stepped away with heavy breaths while their eyes were fixed at the beating door, their hearts pounding almost in sync with every thud. The only thing left to do was to wait and to be ready for the worse; she slung her bow off from her shoulder and readied an arrow of the few she still had.

Although the skies were grey, the light still made its way through the blocked windows, illuminating the room with a fragile clarity, so delicate that it would seem to fade away at any moment. There were tables and chairs flipped over, empty shelves with a lot of stains, broken freezers and a couple of doors by the back.

"Alright, the door works... so what now?" Jack inquired tightening the grip of his stick. The insistent moans and screeches were barely audible inside the building.

"What do yeh think? If 't breaks we'll fight our way oot!"

"Err... you might wanna grab something." The girl nodded in a rush and looked for anything in reach. Quickly searching with her eyes, there was nothing around them but chairs, plastic dishes and such.

"The gun Punz, you did get it right?" Jack's voice rose with worry.

"R-right, yes..." She took a handgun from the satchel she was carrying and pointed it at the door. By the way she was shaking, there was no doubt she'd never hold a gun before, her legs were struggling to maintain her balance and her features reflected fear.

But she noted something else in her eyes, as if she'd seen...

"It's okay..." Jack said, looking her with concerned eyes. "Just... just breathe..."

A screech made her attention snap to the door again, it was louder than all of the other from before. The groans grew louder along every hammering on the door with a cracking sound, shatters now visible over the wood. Shadows of limbs began to creep over the windows, disturbing what little light entered the room and slamming the planks in fury. They were surrounded, and she began to feel anxious; she wasn't used to be in between walls for so long, even in her room she'd moved her bed near the window just to feel the moving breeze.

Silence suddenly fell around them as the door ceased its pulse, losing what new life it had. The shadows were now immobile, as if something else had caught their attention. Endless seconds that were making the air much heavier, and they held their breaths unconsciously, dreading to disrupt the stillness and whatever caused those things to stop.

Then a far rising sound reached her ears, like a screech of some sort. She'd never heard something like that before, not even a vehicle, perhaps another one of those infected that evolved.

The sound grew larger and she was sure now that whatever that was, it was coming towards them. Rapunzel let out a shriek when the ground trembled for a second with the strong whistle. But as soon as that came, it vanished like a flash of lighting, the infected now screaming and moaning in frenzy. Jack rushed over to the door and peeked through the keyhole while the girls looked outside from the gaps between the panels. They were... running away.

"What the..." Jack's flabbergasted whisper was the first sound to break the silence.

"My thoughts exactly," Rapunzel slowly nodded at her side, every eye stuck at the blurs in the distance. "Did that thing just..."

Deciding that they were somewhat safer now, she hurried to the door and took the chair away, almost hitting the lad in the process. His grumble went ignored when she went outside and stared at the distance, trying to make sense of whatever was that happened.

* * *

><p>Fourth day in the station - Late-afternoon -
Rain

Rapunzel was sitting next to a barricaded window with her head tilted to the right over her hand, watching how infinite drops hit the empty streets outside through the little spaces amidst the boards, the symphony of fallen crystals complementing the beat of a melody that few bothered to hear nowadays. The tip of her finger draw slow, smooth circles over the edge of a mug resting on the table as her mind drifted off into the distance, steam rising from the warm tea and dancing around her cheeks.

So far, the only things they've managed to gather were a bunch of small boxes of tea, some cookies, candles, a First Aid kit, bunches of snacks and bottles of water. Luckily there was still running water and gas so cooking wasn't such the luxury, and with Merida hunting

some passer-by birds and Jack occasionally scavenging nearby buildings, they were managing themselves just fine.

The sound of falling rain was ringing in her ears. It'd started out as a comfortable drizzle a couple of hours earlier, now it was pouring with rain, nonetheless it was just as enjoyable. Pascal was napping on her lap, and disturbing the little thing from his sleep was out of the question. The place wasn't so dark either, just the usual grey colour that made its way inside along with a touch of blue and white. But she needed to be outside, at least for a little while, just to see everything around her, the colours and sounds and to feel the soft breeze play with her blonde hair, even if it sounded silly.

No infected walked the streets for now, which was kind of weird actually, considering they were everywhere all the time. But it wouldn't hurt to just sit there outside by the door, right? The roof of the outside entrance would keep her dry and if anything happened she'd get back inside in no time.

"Hey," Jack said resting his hip by the edge of the table, one hand holding the staff over his shoulder. "You certainly seem far away, everything okay in there?"

"Mhm," Her hand left the mug and began to stroke the chameleon when their eyes met. "Just looking outside..."

"Something tells me there's more than just looking."

She gave him a look with half-lidded eyes, head still resting on her hand and a contagious smile plastered to her face.

"So, no telling huh?" A shook of her head was all he got as an answer.

"...C-curse this door!_" An angry screech made their heads snap up at the far side of the room. Merida was stubbornly trying to open one of the locked doors between mutters and weird curses.

"Well, at least you're not stuck like Red over there." He chuckled and pocketed his free hand.

"..._this blasted_â€œOi, Ah heard tha'!" Merida snapped from the back. "Why daenae ye give me tha' sta'aaf of yers so we get this thin' huh?"

The boy twirled the stick around and sat on the table with a snarky grin, legs dangling back and forth. "Nah, I'm sure you can do that on your own. We believe in you, right Punz?"

Rapunzel held up a hand to her mouth trying to stifle a giggle, she then felt a movement on her lap and found Pascal with its eyes opened stretching a bit. She smiled fondly and placed him on the table before standing up and walking towards the Scot.

"Mer," She placed a hand on her shoulder, the girl faced her slowly. "Why don't you take a break? It's been hours now." Even if they've just met a couple of days ago, Rapunzel quickly considered her a close friend; a stubborn, spirited and good friend to say the least, but a friend nonetheless. "Hey, would you like to sit outside with me

for a bit? I'm sure Jack can take care of this in no time."

"What?" He chimed in standing on the table, his stick over his shoulders.

"And let him make a mess out of everythin'? _Pff_" Merida snorted. "Fat chance lassie."

"Aww, come on, just a little while..." Rapunzel batted her eyelids, knowing her puppy eyes always worked. And they certainly did.

"Arigh' then," She stood up inhaling and made her way to the main door before pointing a finger at Jack. "If anythin' happens Ah'll know it, ye hear?" Her face flashed a grin before she twirled around almost hitting his face with a mane of red curls and made her way to the door.

"Sorry," Rapunzel mouthed with a smile.

"_You gotta be kidding me..._" Jack mumbled as the girls left him in there, a small proud smirk appearing over his face. Maybe some of his usual mischievousness was getting stuck with her.

He shrugged and hopped off the table, the doors left untouched as he grabbed a cracker and served himself some more tea.

The sound of the rain filled her ears as soon as they sat near the door. Even with the water falling there were a lot more colours out here, and a lot more light too. A soft breeze caressed her and she closed her eyes letting out a warm breath. Merida smiled at the sight.

"Ye seem at ease out here Punzie."

"Hu-huh," She nodded, her eyes still closed, and rested her back against the floor, "Sometimes... sometimes I just need some time outside you know?"

"Yeah me too, even more so when Ah was little." By the tone of her voice she realized Merida's face had a small smile, maybe a bit sad, presumably out of longing than anything else. It had happened to her before, Jack too.

"Really? Why?" Rapunzel asked, genuinely interested in her.

"...My mother." She opened her eyes at that, feeling guilty for asking. Then she felt worse remembering the argument she had with her own before she sneaked out and escaped with...

"I'm sorry." She managed to say to keep her own memories at bay.

Merida shook her head keeping the smile, curls dancing along. "Nae... it's a'right, we're a'right. Although we argued most of the time back then, Mum and Ah. Sayin' Ah should behave like a proper miss..." She snickered as she went on. "But Ah had none o' that. Ah wud rather be campin' and huntin' than curtsying, Ah'm no lady, thank ye very much..."

They both laughed softly and stared at the distance in comfortable silence. And even though she was submerged in her own longing feelings, and Merida too probably, she felt relieved and warmer, remembering that she wasn't alone out here.

Merida suddenly shot up, making the blonde flinch a little, and slung her bow off from her shoulders reading an arrow at the same time.

"_Quiet..._" She whispered and took a couple of steps ahead, Rapunzel stood up slowly before following her. As they went on she noticed a silhouette crawling by the street,

They stopped where the outer ceiling of the station ended, and Merida aimed firmly taking steady breaths, a curtain of drops mere inches away from her face, falling on the bow and stretched arm. Then she recognised it.

A little gasp escaped her. "Don'tâ€"

"Ah Won't."

It was a dog; a black, big furry dog. The largest she'd ever seen.

But then she noticed what it was doing. It was dragging somebody across the street, white teeth shining in complete contrast to the black shaggy hair.

A boy, even with the distance between them she could tell that right away. A helmet with a small crack on the dark glass concealed his face; he wore what looked like a black leather jacket and dark brown jeans, both slightly torn and stained. Seeing how the dog was struggling to drag him under this downpour, it was surely his.

Merida hissed her name as she ran. It could have been the adrenaline she felt when the thought appeared, along with the water falling soaking her in a matter of seconds; or maybe it was that these two were stranded just like them, struggling to find shelter.

The dog noticed her when she got closer and let go of the jacket's neck before facing her with greenish eyes. Then it flashed its teeth and flinched forward growling.

"_Whoa, whoa-whoa-whoa..._" Rapunzel said under her breath, taken aback at the sight, and held up her hands slowly.

"Easy, boy, easyâ€"calm down." Her palms were facing the dog calmly as she carefully took slow steps towards the two. "It's alright...easy boy, easy..." Her eyes were quickly shifting between the boy laying there and his pet, the dog's growl quieting under the rain.

"_Easy..._" She said in a slow, soothing tone. She smiled when the dog locked eyes with her and hid its teeth, now calm and somewhat confused at what was going on, drops racing down from the end of its snout and hanging furred ears. Then she knelt in front of it and stretched her hand, assuring that she was only trying to help them. "That's it!"

It sniffed her and she beamed. She cooed a long "Aww" before petting and scratching the dog enthusiastically, its black tail flapping against the lane.

"You're such a good boy! Yes you are." Rapunzel seemed oblivious to the falling rain.

"Huh... Punz? Ye might wanna be careful." Merida commented warily behind her.

"Oh, he's nothing but a big sweetheart."

The redhead shrugged and put the arrow back. "Sooo, what are ye goin' to do with him?" She gestured to the body lying there motionless. Right now wasn't a very good time to argue with Rapunzel about strangers and rash actions, like if she were one to talk anyway.

"Just, help me with him okay?" She asked, almost pleadingly.

The skies were turning into a darker shade of grey, announcing the imminent storm that would rage in the night, a strong whistling wind playing with their wet locks. A smile crossed her face after Merida nodded with a heavy sigh.

"...Why does it... have to... to rain like t-this..."

"Ye wanted... to drag... him." She muttered as they dragged him to the front of the station, both completely soaked, his dog following them with eyes fixed in the pair, growling a little when the Scot gripped the boy's arm.

"Och, shut it ya fleabag!" Merida mumbled as they dropped him near the door and noticed something, her sharp gaze drifted to the boy's legs and back to his helmet in a flash. Rapunzel followed the line of sight and her eyes widened. His left foot was a metal prosthetic.

Merida knelt and took the helmet off, revealing shaggy brown hair and a few slight scars. "Ah'm not doin' mouth t' mouth lassie." She said with narrowed eyes and stared at the blonde who just rolled her own chuckling softly in reply. After unzipping his jacket muttering and leaning over to his chest, she looked up and flashed a small smile, red curls sprayed all over his green shirt; it was more a relief of not having to do CPR than anything else.

He was breathing.

3. Locked

(A/N: Remember when I told you I'd write something down?)

-Leans over-

...I lied.

_Just kidding, this took a whole more time to finish than I thought. Guess it's because I've been modifying some parts just because I felt

they were too slow and then too fast. H__ope you like this chappy.)_

* * *

><p>Exiting Main Road - Entrance to Raven Point Path - Beware of passer-by lizards

The ground trembled as a lightning flashed and vanished over the distance in mere seconds, dodging a couple of cars and gliding down the way at breakneck speed.

The tunnel grew closer by the second. It was now or never.

"What do you think bud? Wanna give this a shot?" He asked rather loudly through his helmet as they avoided a couple of trucks.

Hiccup received a groan in reply, more one of scepticism than actual uncertainty. Of course _he'd_ be the one acting all sensible now.

"_Toothless_, it'll be fine." He smiled and rolled his shoulders as they approached the entrance. "You ready?"

With a soft bark as the signal he closed his eyes. The shining sunlight disappeared, the bike's heavy roars turned into purrs, the path ahead was now empty and the ground beneath them disappeared. The only sound he heard was his own calm breaths. After the exit, it was Toothless' turn.

He felt the dog's movements and mirrored them perfectly; every slight shift, prod and nudge resulting in leans, turns and changes in the speed. It was more out of instinct than cold calculationsâ€"they learnt that the hard way of course.

It wouldn't be their first time if they got wrecked, and it certainly wouldn't hurt as much, but now it wasn't the time to think about that.

Lean left...

He felt dodging a car in a split second and grinned, the sudden gust in his chest increasing the adrenaline that raced through his own highways.

Fourth position...

They blazed together in complete sync, a flawless dance over the asphalt, riding through more curves and cars. They kept going.

Speed drop, no shift, lean right...

Toothless barked once more and his eyes opened, the smile still plastered on Hiccup's face.

Thunder torn the air with a mighty roar, yet there was no storm brewing in the skies when he glanced up, just thin clouds hovering over the endless blue.

The road was straight and empty now, which meant only one thing.

Fourth to fifth...

The wind rushed past them, stabbing his chest and howling a muffled tune in his ears, the engine whistling as the bike reached full speed, but the air he now breathed in his helmet felt confined and damp.

Now something felt different, it was hot; he wasn't on the bike anymore. The pines, the shore, the ground, the sky... everything began to expand and melt, blending into a giant distorted image.

And he was in there again: walls of fire surrounding him, closed eyes exhausted, furious heat suffocating him, the growing barking of Toothless far away. He couldn't breathe anymore, it was too much, and he felt his body betraying him once more as he fell.

* * *

><p>Darkness

His eyes shot open along another thunder, or maybe his mind was just playing tricks again. He was lying on the floor, his body felt cold and tired as shallow breaths left his sore throat.

Another wave of pain ran through his forehead when he stood up, somehow the usual clumsiness was still numb after the dream, or maybe it was just a memory.

He couldn't recall anything from that day, just riding with...

"_Toothless_..."

He looked around, fast and desperate eyes scanning everything, looking for him in the surrounding darkness that thickened with every passing breath.

Where was he? When did they...

A hard thrust knocked him backwards to the floor again, and he screwed his eyes shut, the air escaping his lungs with a groan. But when he got soaked in drool and the huge weight over his chest became _very_ familiar, he couldn't help but chuckle and nuzzle the dog fondly.

"Hey, o-okay...hey t...there, I'm glad to see you too bud." He breathed between laughs trying to clean off his face. "So how didâ€_OW_!" He bent from the pain when Toothless stepped over his stomach.

He got up again after the dog released him and started to check his surroundings. It was nightâ€that was clear enoughâ€and another lightning confirmed the storm outside. His left arm felt numb at the movement and he noticed that it had been bandaged along with his chest; it wasn't difficult to put the pieces together, someone found them and brought them in whatever this place was.

Shaking hands ran through his body in the darkness to make sure his worries were true. And obviously they were. He also didn't have his jacket or his shirt, just pants.

"Great," he muttered. Of course he no longer had his gun, what was he expecting anyway? These guys took it. Then again, any sensible person would have done the same, himself included.

With a long sigh he ran his good hand through his hair, Toothless nudging his side gently, and he petted his snout with a half-smile.

He should consider himself lucky that someone took care of him in the first place; he could have ended up a lot worse.

Kneeling slowly when Toothless sniffed his prosthetic, he was relieved to find it still intact, luckily that little routine maintenance he'd done before paid off. He smiled at the little click sound and at the gift from Gobber he managed to attach and disguise; it wasn't much but it was something, though it would be better to keep it hidden for now, just in case.

Survivors occupied this place, which meant that he could talk his way out given the opportunity, if he didn't manage to screw up like usual. Not that it was the better option, being socially awkward wasn't especially a forte, but it was the lesser of two evils, the latter having to fight, and that was something he'd rather avoid.

When got up something shining in the distance caught his attention, a light.

With cautious steps he crossed a slightly open door, eyes fixed on the glimmering fire, and cautiously made his way towards what he realized was a candle, a small halo barely illuminating a stained table and its surroundings.

"Hey!" A bright voice startled him and he tripped backwards with a yelp. A blonde girl was suddenly at his side with a surprised look.

"Whoops..." Another voice came and now there was a boy with white hair standing in front of him, arm stretched out. "Need a hand?"

"Uh, thanks..." He muttered after getting up.

The boy waved it off and sat over the table with a curious look, hands holding a hockey stick. Then Toothless strode at his side and headed somewhere behind the pair.

A few candles lit the room, shadows dancing with what little drafts entered from the tempest outside, a dark but cosy shade of orange and yellow painted the walls and barred windows. They were in a gas station judging by the shelves, the counter, the tables spread across the room and the large 'Dinoco' sign painted on the wall.

"So, how are you feeling?" The girl asked eyeing the bindings in a rather proudly manner. "You know, not every day I get the chance to 'actually' apply my studies on real life emergencies..."

"It wasn't such an emergency..." The boy waved the stick around.

"Still," The blonde scowled.

"Oo_kay_... I'm alright, I suppose," he shrugged. "Wait, you did all... this?"

The bandages were folded neatly against his arm and chest, and he didn't even feel the wounds.

"Heh, Punzie knows what she is doing when it comes to it." The boy mentioned.

"Oh! This is Jack, I'm Rapunzel." She smiled and arched an eyebrow, waiting for an introduction. To be honest, this was not what he was expecting, at all.

"Hi, um," he rubbed his arm, knowing what was to come. Better get it out the way fast while he could. "My name's Hiccup"

"_Hiccoop Horraendous Haddock._" As soon as that voice interrupted him all three heads turned around. A girl with wild red curls was sitting by the corner, legs over a table and reading a small book, possibly his journal seeing how she'd just enunciated his full name. Looking closely he noticed Toothless near her on the floor staring down at something. Wait, was she wearing his jacket too?

Jack leaned his weight on his stick besides him. "Three names huh?" The tone was more of curiosity rather than mockery. That wasn't the usual reaction he expected.

"Only the first two," he clarified, "but just call me Hiccup."

"Ok... that's a bit of a mouthful."

"Yeah, well... believe me, it's not the worst."

"I'll take your word then. Curly's name is Merida by the way."

"Warnin' yuh Jack." She held up a finger and closed the journal rather harshly. She stood up with her hair whirling violently and walked towards them.

Maybe it was the way her accent reminded him of his dad or her piercing cerulean eyes scrutinizing him, but he couldn't help but feel afraid, if just a little, at the girl in front of him; and that meant clumsy Hiccup to the rescue.

"Haddock... Now where did I hear tha' before?" Merida hummed, a finger tapping her chin. Hiccup glanced at the other two who just shrugged.

It surprised him a little, his dad wasn't really known for his last name.

On the other hand, '_The Vast' _was considered more of a title the

rugby team and the fans had given him than an actual nickname, especially after they reached the Internationals representing Berk and Iceland both. Even after the accident that one reporter from the news mentioned him as that. He may deny it sometimes, but Hiccup knew that deep inside his dad had grown fond of being called that. It defined him almost too well, considering the fact that he was... well, _vast_.

Toothless grumbled at what he now recognized as a little reptile, a chameleon seeing how it changed colour with every soft bark.

"Oh, hold on..." Rapunzel mumbled and darted past them to the counter. After a bit she handed him his shirt, it had a few mended slashes and such.

He accepted it gladly, now he didn't feel so uncomfortable anymore, but still... "I, er... can I have that... too?" He pointed a wary finger.

Merida snapped back from her thoughts blinking, blue eyes trying to avoid his gaze all of a sudden, and took off the jacket. A slight shade of pink tinted her cheeks, but maybe it was just the dim light of the candles or her hair or both. The jacket had a few scratches around and some slender gashes by the arms, and he wondered how bad his state had been when they found him.

With the cosy weight back he looked at the three more carefully. So far these guys seemed alright.

"So, I guess I should thank you... you know, for all... this..."

"Not really, Punz was the one who fixed you up and all." Jack pointed out. "Besides, there's no problem about bringing in complete strangers, right?"

Rapunzel was about to retort when something else caught her attention and cooed. Hiccup felt Toothless nudging his leg and found the chameleon sitting comfortably over the dog's head, helpless greenish eyes silently pleading.

"Aw! Pascal you've made friends!" She clapped her hands together.

"Well would you look at that." Jack snickered and hopped off the table.

"Sorry bud... can't help you with that." He chuckled and turned to them. "He's Toothless by the way."

"_Toothless_?" Merida scrunched up her nose kneeling down and fumbled with his snout, white teeth shining with the lights. The dog gave Hiccup a look of agony mixed with self-pity, its pride now shattered in pieces. "Seems pretty toothy to me..."

"Well, he had none the time we met, and when he grew them the name just stuck."

"_Grew them_..." Jack inquired and tilted his head with a raised eyebrow. "How come?"

"No idea, one day they just appeared out of a€"

A loud crash some inches away startled them and everybody jerked up.

* * *

><p>"...nowhere..."

Toothless' ears pricked up and fixed his eyes at a door while everyone stood in place, the shadows of the candles slowing their pulse.

"...What?" Jack whispered.

Merida stepped forward and rested her ear over the door. There it was again, something moving on the other side. "_In here_..." She tilted her head. Hiccup narrowed his eyes; in a flash he noticed she had a gun at the back of her pants, but from what he was able to see, it wasn't his.

"_Was?_ You want to open it?" Rapunzel gaped.

"If there's somethin' tha' could be a threat, then yes, I want to get rid of it. Righ' now."

"But... what if..." She mumbled.

"Then we'll deal with it!" Merida said with a nod, her voice firm and regal.

"That's locked," Jack hissed.

"I kno'ow..."

"You even kicked it and still a€"

"Well yer not helping either!"

"A lever perhaps..." Hiccup mused, arms crossed.

Jack's eyes darted from the stick in his hand to the girls and hardened his grip shaking his head. "No way, no, I want to know what's inside there as much as you do but no, not this again, I'm not giving you a€hey!"

"Jist give me the blasted thinA'!" She snapped and began to chase him about, eyes narrowed. Jack sprinted around chairs and slid over tables with no trouble at all clutching the hockey stick so hard that his knuckles went white, small chuckles escaped him as Merida bumped into almost everything in her haste. Toothless looked at the two, eyes curious and amused, before he nudged Hiccup's leg.

"Guys _schluÃ_!" Rapunzel held up her hands and hissed more incomprehensible gibberish.

Putting aside Toothless' insinuation, along with the fact that something _was_ inside that room, a thought began to bother Hiccup. He hesitated at what popped up, and hated that he was even

considering it... maybe. The damned curiosity that had gotten him into trouble before was winning over common sense again. A lever would work, yes, but something else could be far easier to use at this moment, something he had.

Merida leaned against the counter and huffed. The lad wanted to keep his little branch? Fine, he could shove it up his arse for all she cared. She crossed her arms stomped towards the door, she was going to open it with our without...

Stopping besides Rapunzel, they found Hiccup leaning over the door and examining the keyhole. He kneeled and reached for his prosthetic, though she couldn't make out exactly what he was doing, and after hearing a few clicks the door was unlocked.

He stood up and turned around to find everybody staring at him, Merida's eyes shifted to what he held in his hands, like a weird scrap of metal or some sort of Swiss army knife.

"Did he just use his _leg_?" Jack whispered to Rapunzel who tilted her head with a look of mixed astonishment and curiosity, Pascal mirroring her over her shoulder.

"Yeah..." Hiccup chuckled nervously trying to avoid eye contact. "...my leg..." He didn't think about this part at all, now the nervous babbling was inbound. "Er-I... well... I know it looks... kind of... weird..."

"Nae," Merida shook her head, "That's downrigh' creepy."

"Huh," a smirk formed on Jack's features. "Do you have anything else there?"

"_No_..." Hiccup pursed his lips. He kneeled down as smoothly as possible and put the _knife_ back in place.

A large rat ran out the door bumping his leg and was gone as quickly as it appeared, Rapunzel almost tripped with a yelp when it sped past her, Toothless darting behind in a blur towards another room .

The awkward situation was gone as well, now everybody's attention was fixed on the new darkness; Merida was the first to react and pushed open the door.

With some candles they managed to light up the place a bit. Now that they could see better her face lit up. It was a storage room, exactly like the other but shaped like an "L" and had a larger shelf with boxes and supplies, junk and other assorted things spread over the floor.

"Finally, nae more damned tea for me." Merida smirked reaching for a small coffee box.

"But I thought you loved tea," Jack said in his mischievous manner. She snorted at his tone, the devil. The mood wasn't going to go down so easy.

"Not at all Yeti... Oh yeh beauty!" She grabbed a bottle of whisky from a high shelf and eyed it with a wide grin. "Now this is a Jack I like."

"Ouch," he grinned. "Punzie think fast!" Jack flung a cereal bar at her. She beamed and shared some with Pascal, her braid swinging to and fro as she thanked him with her mouth full.

"Help me with th' bags lass, will yeh?" Merida asked, holding a large box, before the girls left the room chattering away.

Hiccup watched them with a smile as he walked along—"curios little group they were"—until he flinched when a rotten stench reached him. By the end of the shelf he noticed something over the far corner, like a shape or a drawing; so he got near, skipping over some leftovers and such, and without thinking touched the image. It felt damp and viscous like paint, but had a strange yet familiar smell, like...

He turned his head and took in a sharp breath. There was blood at his fingertips.

Following the trail he found the source, or rather sources of the stains and the smell, and froze as a cold chill ran down his spine.

Right in front of him, merely a step away, laid three corpses sitting against the walls in the small corner. In the middle laid a note and a stained pistol. The gun was surely going to be useful in the future, no matter how or where he'd gotten it. '_Sorry_' was scrawled on the paper in shaky and loose letters, as if the one writing had been completely terrified.

He glanced up and examined the bodies closely, the candle radiating warmth against his cheek, and noted that there were two guys at his sides and a woman in front of him. They all had bite marks besides other wounds, though only the guys had stains sprayed over the walls behind them.

Gears started to roll as his green eyes took in each detail, and everything materialized in front of him, the scene happening again.

Sobs of pain and grief, the gun spinning on the ground, slow breaths, mouth open and eyes screwed shut, flinching at the blast, tears falling down her cheeks, shaking hands struggling to take the gun, the sprayed walls...

"Wow..." Jack's voice behind him brought him back to the present.

He just nodded unable to find the words. They stood there staring for God knows how long until Jack spoke up again. "What's that?"

"W-what?" Hiccup finally said with a shallow voice.

"Her head," he whispered, "_look at this thing_." There was an angry gash that ran deep across the forehead which, though stained, revealed something sprouting out, like a coral of some kind.

Their eyes widened when the protrusion moved slightly and a low sound escaped the body. The woman's chest was rising and falling, like breaths, the movements almost invisible in the candles' lights.

The breathing turned into sniffs. Something was off. Sniffing... It was sniffing them.

This was bad, very bad.

Hiccup slowly stood up, careful not to make any more noise with his foot, as Jack took a tentative step back. Then its eyes opened to reveal glassy white eyes staring back at them.

"_Oh shhh_â€" "

Jack's swear melted in an excruciating screech that boomed all around, the windows of the station shuddering so violently that looked as if they were going to break at any second. They clapped their hands to their ears, a wave of vertigo rising in their heads that almost sent them stumbling to the floor. Hiccup swore his ears were bleeding against his palms, he couldn't even hear his own voice, let alone his own thoughts.

It grabbed his leg and he tripped, the scream never stopping as he tried to kick himself free in panic. Jack started to bash its head to no avail. Toothless appeared and tugged at his jacket, struggling to get Hiccup out of there.

Suddenly the scream ended and he noticed its head pierced with the hockey stick, nevertheless the grip remained painfully strong. Jack stomped on the arm cutting it off and helped him up.

After they closed the door, they found the girls staring at them in shock.

"What's that?" Rapunzel asked hardening her grip on a frying pan.

"...zo...zombie..." He panted leaning his weight on the stained stick.

"And that?" The blonde asked once again, pointing with her new weapon the arm that was still holding on to Hiccup's leg.

"Whaâ€"!? Ew, man..." He shook it off away against the wall. Merida and Jack were stifling their laughter at his reaction, after everything that happened in just mere seconds...

But the humour disappeared when moans echoed and poundings appeared on the main door and windows, much louder and harder than last time.

"Oh no..." Merida scoffed as Toothless began to growl. Another horde...

"We need to get out of here, now!" Hiccup said and held up the stained gun. It would be just a matter of minutes. Merida readied her pistol and grabbed a backpack, the end of a bow sticking out, while Rapunzel hurriedly stuffed more supplies in the other one.

"It won't be enough." Jack whispered to himself. The pounding kept going as he stood there lost in thought. Last time had been pure luck, there had to be way to hold the zombies off if they were going

to make a run for it.

A glimmering candle gave him an idea.

"What yeh doin'!?" Merida seethed and bolted around when he opened her backpack and began rummaging through it. He took out the bottle of whisky and stuffed a piece of rag in.

"...guys?" Rapunzel said, eyes darting from window to window.

"Hey, I'll only use it if they get in, okay?" He winked as he lit up the cloth with a nearby candle.

The door began to crack.

"Guys!" She hissed.

"Don' yeh dare," she muttered.

"Here they come." Hiccup warned, Toothless ready at his side.

Jack just grinned his lopsided grin and tossed the Molotov over his shoulders without even looking.

On cue the door busted open and the explosion burned the first zombies creating a barrier of fire over the entrance. The few ones that didn't torch all the way and made it inside gained some bullets in their heads, courtesy of Merida.

Just when the fire began to spread inside Hiccup broke a large window away from the action and motioned them to follow.

And follow they did.

There storm looked like it had ceased a few minutes ago, the moon's light pierced through the scattering clouds and illuminated their path as they ran in the night. And even though the station on fire proved to be a good distraction, there were still runners chasing them.

They ran as fast as they could through the main street until they reached a bridge across the river. Things were not looking good. At the distance there were more infected, and to make things worse, the ones behind were getting closer.

Hiccup's mind was running a mile a minute as Toothless stared at the infected ahead. "If we fight those ones over there will come to us," he signalled at the much larger mob, "and if we keep running these ones over here will alert them too."

"So it's hide-or-die then." Jack said and began to scan the area.

"Pretty much."

"All th' places are blocked do'own,"

"What about this?" Rapunzel kicked a manhole lid away revealing a sewer entrance.

"Paerfect!" Just then a loud yell came from the bridge.

"Perfect." Hiccup sighed. Now both hordes were coming.

They rushed over to the hole and Toothless jumped down in a blur that made Rapunzel gasp. Merida looked at Hiccup in sudden worry but he shook his head.

"It's alright, we've done worse, come on!" He hurried them inside.

Jack got in last, and just when he was about to cover the entrance, he noticed something in the oncoming mob by the bridge, a towering shadow among the other zombies. Next thing he saw there was one of those abandoned cars flying through the air at him. He pulled the lid and fell down the stairs, murky water splashing everywhere when he landed.

The walls trembled when the car hit the ground above them.

4. Apocalyptic Measures

A/N: Happy Easter you fantastic folks you!

So... yeah, honestly I have mixed feelings about this one. I mean there are backstories, some character development, story advancements and some tiny winks scattered here and there (just the usual loose words stuffed together). But I still feel it a wee bit slow, or perhaps it's just that I can't wait for the story to pick up speed on the main lane.

_Anyway, hope that you enjoy this one, took its time but got here eventually. __Let me know what you guys think!_

* * *

><p>Sewer Exit - Morning... hopefully

It was hard to tell actually, apart from being tired, hungry and underground. The power was surprisingly on yet only a couple of lights lit up the place with what little bright they could provide, a fragile beam reflected upon his blue eyes.

"_Looks clear enough_..." His voice came as a stifled murmur from behind the door. There weren't sounds or other signs of neither anybody nor anything from the other sideâ€"though that didn't mean that _they_ weren't there, it had happened to him lots of times.

There was always something out there.

"..._Go on then_."

The click sounds in the lock were soon followed by some movements of the handle, trying not to disturb the ghastly silence that haunted the place. They should have known better...

The door was suddenly kicked open and the delicate light began to shine over a startled Hiccup on one knee, knife in hand.

His expression changed into a frown as he looked at Merida stomping off, a hand slinging the bag over her shoulders and the other holding her bow.

"Um... Please, by all means."

"Don't mind her," Rapunzel helped him up when he put the piece back and closed the door. "It's that place, put her on edge."

"So much for being sneaky... It's been putting us all on edge." Jack remarked as they paced around, end of his stick scraping the ground.

A subway station, there was no doubt. The place had a grey atmosphere, with a train wrecked on the rails, broken ticket machines, debris and stained walls. There was a metal portcullis blocking the stairs to the outside, a large padlock keeping it shut from the zombies roaming up there.

When he turned around something caught his attention and he couldn't pull himself to stop staring. He didn't flinch at the scent, being down in the sewers for nearly two hours had taken a toll over his sense of smell, pants completely damp past their ankles. It wasn't the stained sheet covering the body but the graffiti above, black words standing out over the glazed tiles.

_ 'Heres Ben The tosser who had to go and save my arse and get bit Wish I knew what Im going to do now The worlds gone to hell I cant even bury the git with all the zombies around Hope this enough for you bud'_ _

It got him thinking. It was too dangerous to be exposed like that and he wondered if someone would take that risk if the worst happened to him... or if he would do the same.

His mind drifted back in time, searching for any sign of them, yet the few ones still felt vague. All came back to that one moment. He felt the same cold of that night at the pond, the same fear, before other memories flashed by. He realized he never really knew anybody like that, not even the guys from the team. There were some good times with them yes, but mostly he remained silent, reserved, giving some casual comments. Perhaps he shouldn't have kept his guard up like that back then...

Yet Cottontail sometimes had it coming.

A gentle laugh behind him made him felt his breath again and out of the corner of his eye he noticed her, golden locks hanging about, sharing some berries with Pascal.

No.

That day would never come. He wouldn't let it.

"Hey, can we stay here a sec?" Hiccup slumped on a bench with a sigh. "I need to take care of some things." Toothless jumped at his side, tongue loose and tail waving, and he pushed his snout playfully chuckling. "Come on bud..."

His eyes returned to the blanket at those last words and a new feeling began to grow, but he shook all that away before anything else could come back, now it wasn't the time.

"What thin's?" Merida hissed from behind, her gaze fixed on the ruined train, fiery curls falling over her shoulders.

"_This_..." Hiccup took off his prosthetic and began to detach it apart, a good amount to Jack's surprise.

Before anybody could ask why he explained, "We've been walking through the sewers. I don't want to know about whatever the hell was in that water back there... I have to make sure, just so nothing happens."

Jack nodded leaning his weight on his stick nonchalantly as Rapunzel sat alongside the dog and eyed the sprayed parts curiously. Merida huffed and collapsed on another bench a few feet away, her backpack dropping to the floor just as soundly.

A smile hitched to the corner of his lips when she asked to help, her voice eager like a child in a game, and began to clean and attach some pieces, occasionally grimacing at some of the stuff that dripped to the floor.

"So Hiccup," she began, trying to figure out where a spring went, "you're from America right?"

"What?" He asked with a half-smile, his tone a little taken aback but warm.

"I mean, you sound like you're from there."

"I guess I do," he chuckled, "family thing perhaps" "my dad sounds like Merida."

"Is he from Scotland?"

He shook his head. "That's the thing; we live by the northern sea. An island called Berk."

"Berk? Never heard of it." Jack said rolling a little rod between his fingers. "_What's this...?_"

"Technically it's part of Iceland, but it's just an island in the middle of nowhere."

"Is there the restored Viking village and museum?" Rapunzel inquired.

"Vikings?" Jack sniggered. "Punzie, where do you read all of that?"

Hiccup nodded to her in honest surprise.

"And you speak Icelandic too?"

"Yep, _bæðir_." A smile crossed her face at that. "We speak English in general, never really thought about it until now..."

"So how did you end up here?" She gave up and dropped the spring. It was obvious. Rapunzel was just too curious.

Hiccup looked thoughtful, considering the answer, as he grabbed the piece in question and clipped it back in place swiftly. "Came looking for a place to continue my studies, it was either a uni here or the one in Reykjavik." She narrowed her eyes as if trying to read him.

"What did ye study?" Merida was suddenly at their side looking at the weird puzzle on the floor.

"What are you guys, interrogating him?" Jack grinned and avoided the pebble directed at him.

"It doesn't matter," Hiccup replied casually as he continued to assemble his prosthetic. "Not anymore. I first travelled around Scotland for a few days, then zombies popped up and well... here we are." He finished patting Toothless.

"So..." Jack reached out and grabbed another tiny piece. "How many times have you done this?"

He chuckled shaking his head, took it from his hands and attached it back. "Nah, just a couple..."

"Still, _that's so weird_."

"Ye're the weird ones laddies." Merida said snarkily, hands rummaging through her backpack, unruly hair framing her face. "Yeh with th' white hair and all tha' climbin' and new meat with all... _this_."

"_Climbing?_" Hiccup glanced at Jack with his head tilted. He shrugged with a smirk, his stick over his shoulders.

"You just gestured to all of him!" Rapunzel shoved her lightly on the arm with a giggle. The redhead scrunched her nose and took out a chocolate bar.

Hiccup scratched the back of his neck. "You got me. I'm a one-legged, mad tinkerer biker and an adrenaline junkie in my free time."

Their laughs echoed through the empty tunnels as they kept chatting, occasionally eating some snacks and other supplies, the mood now softened despite their dark surroundings. It sort of surprised him to know that he lost his leg in a fire accident years ago and not to some horde of zombies in frenzy. When they were done with all the parts they agreed to rest there for a bit before eventually going outside—the subway tracks were out of the question, they already had their fair share of dark and grim for the day.

Merida was the first to give in to slumber and soon Rapunzel followed, curled up over the bench using her bag as a pillow. Hiccup was on the floor with his arm over his eyes blocking the light, Toothless right next to him.

Jack was staring at the ceiling, his mind blank. The only sounds he could hear were the snores and breaths of his friends.

"_...who would've thought..._" he mused in a whisper.

He held his hockey stick over him with both hands as his thumb caressed the small gashes he had put on the now stained wood, years of use having taken almost all of the silvery dye away.

A mark for every victory.

He remembered each one without a glitch.

A smile found its way on his pale face, just like when he got it for the first time, that same smile of wonder.

Friends in the apocalypse, who would've thought...

* * *

><p>A hand clamped down on her mouth woke her up, eyes snapping open and barely. Just when she instinctively began to struggle her way free with muffled yells and reach for her bow the man pressed a gun at her throat and grinned.<p>

"Shh..." He whispered in her ear with a rough voice. "Remember me?" The cold metal and the bastard burying his nose in her locks made her grit her teeth, blood beginning to boil in her veins, and she forced herself to look around.

In what little time she had she managed to count five more of them, some had their face covered with scarves and were holding assault rifles and pump-action shotguns, then she noticed Rapunzel standing near her, a bandit pressing a hand over her mouth, the blonde looking at her in fear. Merida's gaze darted to the boys and recognized Hiccup staring at her from the floor, his arm covering his face so that he looked like he was sleeping. They locked eyes and he shook his head slightly, silently telling her that it wasn't the time, not against such heavy artillery.

She shot the man a glare as he stood up and removed his hand, the gunâ€"which she now realized was a submachine gunâ€"still pointing at her.

"Get up, slowly..." He ordered.

"Bite me..." She whispered back.

The man shook his gun. "You ought to be more polite to a man with a gun, sugar bum..."

He signalled with his head for the others who kicked the boys awake. Afterwards the four were kneeling on the floor while the bandits rummaged through their backpacks.

"...they should be here anytime now."

"We have a raid to do before dusk."

"I know mate..."

"...I still don't get why we don't jus' shoot n' go."

"Because he said so you git... next time try to lis'en instead of dozin' off."

"Yeah righ', 'cuz you never scratched yours back there."

"...shut up."

"_So, now what...?_" Jack said eyeing them, voice just above a whisper.

"_...wo ist Toothless?_" Rapunzel whispered to Hiccup when Pascal chirped tentatively from behind her neck.

He blinked a few times before getting what she meant. "_...part of the plan..._"

"_Ye_â€"part o' the plan?!_" Merida gaped.

"Obviously," Jack rolled his eyes

"Try shutting yeh!" A bandit shoved his side with the back of the rifle.

"_...now, now, it's too early in the morning to be raising your voice like that..._" A dark voice rang in the air and they turned to a man stepping down the stairs, like a dark form against the glazed tiles, hands folded in front of him.

The atmosphere seemed to grow dim with his presence and everyone fell silent while he looked at each of the four, amber eyes expressionless.

"So what do we have here?" His gaze landed on Hiccup. "Ah, looks like our friend has gotten some new loyal pets..." An end of his pale mouth turned up.

"Tell me, do you still want to trade or you no longer need that fuel?" He glared back, expression defiant as the man flashed a crooked smile.

"Such a shame, though. It truly was a nice bike," he shook his head with a chuckle, "but don't worry, I've already taken care of that." Taking a couple of steps forward he looked at Rapunzel unimpressed in silence before he stopped with an arched eyebrow, his features slowly changing.

"Hang on. Is that... Jack Frost?"

Another bandit gripped Jack's arm and got him to his feet.

His blue eyes widened and he let out the words with a breath, "...no shit."

* * *

><p>At least their pants were dry now.<p>

"So you know this guy from... where?" Rapunzel inquired.

Jack let out a heavy sigh and dropped to the floor, "Back home, one

of the guys I told you about."

"And he stills locks you up in here?"

"Let's say we weren't so _chummy_..."

They had taken them to their place—a police station which was unbelievably nearby, or maybe she'd just lost her sense of direction in that fog—and locked them up inside an empty room with nothing more than a working light bulb and a tiny window at the high end of a wall that lead to the sidewalks, the sound of the infected wandering and growling could be heard from the outside; and she pondered on why they didn't put them in the cells instead.

"Hey, ho, Punzie, if you're too cozy in here I'm sure Pitch would be glad to find another place for you." Jack snapped in a low tone.

"I was just wondering!" She retorted pouting and hugged her knees.
"...gemÄ¼tlich-entchen..."

"Calm down," Hiccup said sitting in front of them.

"Sure, _calm do'own..._ no need t' worry right?" Merida grumbled as she looked away and fumbled with the hem of her wrists.

"I mean it, we're gonna get out of here." Hiccup reassured, yet the look in his eyes was hard to miss.

"Yeah," Jack snickered sarcastically and shook him by his shoulder heartily. "Listen to Hic 'cuz the man has a master plan up his sleeve," then he pushed him aside. "_Get outta here..._"

"Haha, very funny," he muttered as he dusted off his arms before he took out his knife and began to fumble with it.

"But you said there's a plan." Rapunzel pointed at his face as Pascal hopped from her shoulders to her kneecaps.

He took a deep breath. "Yeah, um, sort of..."

"What do ye mean, _sort of_?" Merida whirled around and faced him.

He was silent as his stare turned into a glare at the blade, looking not too comfortable with whatever he was thinking. "We wait."

"We-we what? Jack tilted his head. Hiccup stood up and reached for the small window, barely opening it by an inch with his fingers.

"Fer what?" Merida got to her feet as well and looked at him, but he just kept to his silence, gaze locked at the window.

To the three's surprise, a shadow appeared over the ragged glass, all dark and blurry, but it didn't look like one of the infected. Then it dropped something down into the room and it wasn't until Hiccup picked it up that she realized it was a gun—his gun from the station hours ago.

He looked again at the shadow behind the glass. "I'll try to come out

by the front door, wait for us around there. Alright bud, keep it low!"

After Toothless' blur disappeared he turned his gaze towards the three and found them staring at him slack-jawed. "Look, I managed to strap this to Toothless' collar when those guys appeared, he's been following us ever since."

"That's quite the dog. So, what's the plan to be exact? Booking it?" Jack asked.

"Well, yes."

"Nae. Sneak out, get those gits fast an' quiet, take our stuff, their supplies an' then leave this place."

"Are you serious?" Rapunzel's eyes widened, Pascal climbing back to her shoulder.

"Damn righ'." Merida waved at the door with her hands. "I'm nae leavin' empty handed."

Hiccup ran a hand through his head with a reluctant sigh but nodded. With a mutter he said, "She's right... I'll get the door," and held up the pistol for someone to take.

A long silence fell upon her at the sight of the blood-stained gun. It was going to happen sooner or later, it was the apocalypse after all; yet she still couldn't get herself to reach for it, not even after months of surviving.

Merida looked at her expectantly until she finally took it in a whirl and cocked it.

While Hiccup mumbled something about getting repetitive and peeked through the keyhole, Jack rose to his feet and pulled his hood down. "You ready?"

"_Ja_," Rapunzel nodded, a small smile playing at the corner of her mouth as she stretched her hands and rolled her shoulders, "let's whack ourselves some brits."

He shook his head with a light chuckle.

"_Here we go now, here we go_..." Hiccup muttered at their side and carefully opened the door. They stepped out as silently as possible into a considerably larger room, desks and chairs flipped over, broken computers and countless papers sprayed over the floor—the '_Clean Hands Save Lives_' one caught her attention, and she swore that she'd seen that Sparkswood poster before—there were only a couple of small windows and some working light bulbs; it would have been a lot creepier if not for the two thugs that were conveniently facing the other way, drinking and chatting; good thing Merida managed to knock them out before anything could happen.

"Let's look fer a storage room... we'll check the hallway down there."

"Got it, we'll cover that other one," She nodded, the chameleon over her head imitating her every move.

"Let's hope there aren't too many. We'll see you at the entrance, alright?"

"Yeah-yeah they go' it. Come on new meat..." Merida whirled and towed a confused Hiccup by the wrist who barely managed to keep his balance when he glanced back at them and shrugged.

She chuckled as the two cut the corner. Merida may be a little rash sometimes, and a hothead who shoots first and asks questions later as Jack put once, but she knew how to keep her head when it came down to it. Perhaps she could be brave like that, to challenge danger in the face, to speak up her mind, to put away that fear, to act when she had to...

Just like her.

She took some cautious steps, leaned and reached for a pistol from one of the bandits almost absentmindedly. It was just a gun, no big deal about it, but she couldn't stop thinking about freaking out like that back there. "Punzie?" he laid a hand on her shoulder meeting her gaze and grinned his half-smirk when Pascal skittered onto it.

It wasn't the time now, so with a nod, a smile and a "let's roll," they headed off.

* * *

><p>"...just a wee bit closer..." Merida murmured, fingertips barely touching the edge of the gun. He was struggling to maintain both his balance and hers; his leg began to throb with her weight, the bag filled with different types of ammo strapped around him and all the movements of her feet over his hands, it didn't help that view he had from down there was beginning to distract him too. How had she managed to spot it from such a high shelf was entirely beyond him.

It probably had been his fault, though to his defence she was leaning to the left more than necessary. After the fall he sat up and opened his mouth to apologise when a victory giggle caught him off guard, and she held up a shotgun, cerulean eyes scanning the weapon proudly, face framed by her red curls.

"Huh," he hesitated but tugged a shy smile at one corner of his lips. "Can I keep the pistol now?"

She got to her feet, a grin over her features, and was about to speak when the door suddenly opened and a brawny bearded bandit was now staring at them with eyes wide, rifle in hand.

"What theâ€" "

"Hold up!" Merida aimed just before he could raise his gun and he stood still as she carefully got to her feet. "Drop it." He looked over to Hiccup who was still on the floor with the bag around him. "I mean i' lad," she warned taking a step forward and motioned with the shotgun; Hiccup could only watch in silence as the man placed the rifle on the floor. "Now turn aroun'..."

For a second he noticed the flash of fear in his eyes when he turned

around. His chest raised and fell with slow breaths. Like he already knew what was going to happen. "On yer knees."

Hiccup got up as well, his prosthetic squeaking in the silence when he took a step and lightly touched her arm. She glanced at him through the corner of her eye with that determined look he'd seen before. He felt relieved when she sighed and knocked the man with the back of the shotgun. "Ge' the rifle," she mumbled with a slight frown, eyes not meeting his.

After they dragged the unconscious man in the room and closed the door he felt that nagging thought in his head while they tried to sneak out with what they had. Somehow he wantedâ€"or perhaps neededâ€"to know if she would've done it back there. To do it in a fight was understandable, but to do it to someone who was unarmed or didn't pose a threat...

He didn't realize he had opened his mouth to speak as they were going to cut the corner until she clapped a hand over it and pushed him against the wall. Fortunately the two bandits that sprinted away didn't notice them.

Suddenly they heard a lot of gunfire from the outside, and through the broken windows he recognized Rapunzel's golden locks sticking out from behind a police car by the street. She seemed to have noticed them as well since she was motioning with her hands for the two toâ€"

He almost tripped again with a yelp when Merida yanked his arm forward in her haste towards the windows without glass. After they hopped out his eyes automatically found the source of all the shooting, of all the moans and growls that came with it.

Fog covered their surroundings like a giant grey cloak. He managed to recognize the group of bandits fighting a horde by the entrance, though he saw some more infected running towards them by the corridor they were just seconds ago. That was going to get really ugly really fast. Things were not looking good for those guys.

Luckily they were at a considerable safe distance away from all the action.

"There you are," Rapunzel smiled when they ducked at her side and handed Merida her bow, "look at what we've found just now..." She said placing her pistol down and taking the backpack off her shoulders. When she opened it he was sure he'd never seen Merida's eyes get so wide before.

Easily a dozen grenades were stuffed in there among all the supplies and ammo, there even was her frying pan strapped outside the bag.

"Punzie, how did yeh manage to get all these?" Merida gaped looking up at her.

"Oh, it was nothing," Rapunzel tucked her hair behind her ear with a small chuckle and lifted Pascal from her shoulder. "At least we got our things back."

Hiccup peeked over the trunk, brows furrowed, "And Jack?" Just then

something tapped his head, and after turning around he found the end of a hockey stick merely four inches away from his face.

"Hey!" the boy in question chuckled, "Took a while..."

Merida scoffed when he ducked along, "What gives, ye slowpoke? Did yer get some guns or what?"

Jack feigned hurt but his smile turned into a grin. "You think I need help to beat a brit? Check it out, Curly Sue." He spun the Uzi around his finger smoothly.

"Ha!" Merida pointed at the submachine gun with a snort, "Ye call that a weapon?" She cocked her shotgun movie-style, "Now that's a weapon." Hiccup rolled his eyes and attached the knife back.

A familiar nudge at his back made him turn around and Toothless greeted him with a tilted head, teeth holding a machete, black tail waving playfully. He dropped the blade to the ground and pushed it forward with a paw.

"Huh, thanks buddy." Hiccup said. He grabbed it and checked the edge until Toothless let out a little whine. When their gazes met, eyes bright against the black fur, he understood what the dog was thinking; or perhaps it was the other way around again.

The marooned feeling appeared and this time let out the sigh, green eyes averted, a sad smile finding its way as he stared at the ground.

He looked up and raised his hand to stroke the dog when its ears perked up; beyond the noises from afar a foul scream resonated and before he could even let out a breath some sort of organic rope grabbed Toothless and hauled him away in a flash.

Away.

Into the fog.

5. Welcome to my World

Not now - Not here

The weapon fired, instincts and fear took over while bodies collapsed down the asphalt with each pull of the trigger. There wasn't any caution in his haste inside the veil of thick grey, just sheer desperation. Amidst the growls and whistles of bullets he called out for his friend, slashing infected with the new blade in his right hand and shooting the rifle with the other, the hisses of the group behind him completely out of mind.

With noon slowly on the way, the mist was already beginning to clear and the ceiling of clouds shone a bright white with the sun gleaming behind. Yet there still was a long way to go.

And he refused to do it alone.

Hiccup kept running. Running towards that blank spot he'd seen him disappear. The blade and bullets hit the ground, the air, the

buildings, the foul flesh, the fog, his shouts, the moans, his name in the distance, the barks...

He suddenly stopped in his tracks when the fog cleared and found himself in the middle of a crossing where an attempt of resistance had taken place; there were some military stands and several vehicles blocking the road. But there was something else in his way.

A shiver ran down his neck at the massive horde just a couple of feet in front of him. They hadn't notice him yet, their glassy bright eyes fixed on some other thing—"hell, some of them didn't even have eyes. His mind raced along with his heart, there wasn't enough ammo for this and time was too precious. A loud grunt made his head snap up and let out a breath. Up there by the edge of a building was Toothless struggling to break free from the zombies' grasp, whines of pain escaping him, a thin cloud of smoke surrounding them.

Out of impulse Hiccup dropped the blade and aimed. The distance, along with the fact that they were constantly moving, made it a very difficult shot; and he wasn't exactly a good one either. He wasn't ready when he pulled the trigger, startled and frightened, as a sudden zombie lunged at him. He stumbled to the floor and managed to block its teeth with the rifle, black blood threatening to fall over his face, while he writhed to break away. His free hand found the handle of the blade and the edge soon slashed the zombie's head, though it didn't slice it entirely and it took a few more pulls to remove the machete off the rotten skull.

With his back on the ground and the corpse still over him he tried to look up again to that ledge where he'd seen him to no avail. The cloud of smoke was larger and thicker now. He didn't hear him barking though, or growling, or even whining. He could only hear all the sickening and incessant moans of the infected all around.

Of course they noticed him.

He pushed the zombie to the side with a grimace and got up to slash another one. But after it went down, a lot more lunged at him. Grabbing the rifle back he fired again at the giant meat wave forming all around him, a shout of anger and fear escaping his sore throat as empty shells fell like rainwater pouring down.

Realizing too late that he was cornered against some cars Hiccup tried to fight his way forward; the rifle was bound to run out of ammo at any point now and the machete was not making much of a difference—"they just kept coming, endless and hungry for anything that was alive. He was about to strike another one when something grabbed his leg and sent him to the ground again and began to drag him around incredibly fast, it was a wonder that he maintained the grip on his weapons. With a blind slice over his head he cut what he recognized as the same rope that got Toothless. Yet now that he had it all around him he realized that it wasn't a rope but a tongue, an incredibly large one at that, and he stared at it after getting it off. He didn't have much time though, not even to stand up, because the groans were getting dangerously close by the second.

With his mind racing a mile a minute, he looked around to find some shelter or anything that would serve his cause. When he noticed the abandoned tank conveniently close the infected go to him and instantly rushed at him.

He crawled desperately under it between curses and prayers, a feeling worse than fear crept into his chest while he tried to get away as fast as he could. The growls made him look behind and his eyes widened: one had not only crawled under too, but was biting his prosthetic angrily, teeth trying to dig into the metal. He wasn't sure if it was horror or relief that he felt but he certainly was glad that it didn't bite his actual leg off; on the other hand he wasn't about to test the durability of his experimental alloy right now.

After kicking the zombie's face away he pulled the trigger and killed it along with the others that were dangerously near. At least the corpses acted as a barrier of sorts for the ones behind. But when Hiccup returned his gaze forward, he found more infected crawling under, hands reaching for him. And so he fired again.

This was not going to end well, and he knew it. Looking back and forth he felt his blood racing underneath, the heart threatening to explode inside his chest. His pants grew frantic, hands numb and chest heaving. He closed his eyes and turned his back against the ground exhausted. The air felt fouler and hot, the same fire choking him and burning his skin.

But that'd been a long time ago. If he came out of that inferno once, even if he'd lost a foot in the process, he could definitely come out of this one too.

When he opened his eyes again he took a sharp breath seeing in disbelief the entrance to the tank from below right in front of him. He threw the weapons in and climbed the ladder before this illusion of hope could disappear.

Once inside he closed the hole and crawled away staggering until he bumped against a wall, eyes fixed on the cover.

That had been too close. Too close...

His heart was seemingly trying to steady its pace after the incredible amount of dread and adrenaline, and he looked around the interior absentmindedly until he realized he was sitting right next to a dead soldier. His skin was pale and there were several scars across his face, trails of dry blood running down his cheek and clothes. He tried to avert his gaze with a lump in his throat, the stench already hitting him; and a peculiar revolver in the soldier's hand caught his attention.

Hiccup eyed the rigid figure hesitantly until a quick hand took the gun from the dead man's hold. At least it was loaded.

The movement of fabric and a low groan sent a shiver down his bones and he slowly turned his head, gaping at the bright yellow eyes now staring back.

When the zombie opened its mouth with a growl ready to lunge he fired the gun by its chin, blood splashing the wall and in a flash. He should have thought about that in the first place.

The blast's sound ricocheted on the metal walls and sent his head spinning again, a high pitched shrill ringing in his ears to the

point that he could feel his own blood slowly dripping down. Gritting his teeth, he struggled so he could be sitting again, but he couldn't manage to steady himself; his arms felt heavy, his hands numb and the pain in his mind got worse as he stumbled down with a rising vertigo, hands trying to grab anything to keep his balance, the maddening ring never ceasing, the light blinding him...

Hold on, light...

There was light coming in from above. Wide eyes found the source before his body could react. It took a couple of seconds but collecting what strength he had left he climbed to the upper entrance.

The ring slowly vanished as he was got a glimpse of his surroundings. All the streets were filled with hundreds of infected. Not knowing really why Hiccup shouted his name again when he looked at the roofs of the buildings. Perhaps it was hope, hope that he would find him there barking back at him from the distance with the white sky above them.

A small smile tugged at his face when a dark blur appeared over the rooftops, it didn't matter if it was an illusion. But his expression turned into one of horror when it roared and leapt a hundred feet off the edge, right on top of him.

His hands automatically went up and he struggled to maintain its mouth away. With the revolver still in his hand he slowly aimed at the hooded face that was now mere inches away from his. Then he gritted his teeth...

Still holding his breath after the shot Hiccup reached out for the handle, closed the cover and fell down inside the tank again. The pounding of the zombies on the metal resonated on the whole tank.

Then, after he sat again, for some dark, horrendous reason, it hit him.

And it hit him hard...

That time he'd seen him, up there, fighting to break free, he fired...

A horrible guilt emerged inside, like a dagger slowly sinking into his heart, twisting a little bit deeper by the moment. Maybe...

He couldn't haveâ€"he didn't mean toâ€"there was no way he could have...

And now he was trapped in this metal cage. Oh it was all so messed up.

With deep breaths he closed his eyes, the gun spinning on the floor flashing through his mind.

"I'm sorry, for everything." Hiccup whispered and touched his head with the gun, tears welling up but never leaving. It felt so weird, after everything that had happened he was going to end up stranded here anyway. Perhaps he'd been wrong all along. This was stupid. He

was stupid. He still was that useless, scrawny, awkward boy that always screwed up everything. Having lost a leg was only the outcome of him trying to be someone he knew wasn't. Just as he tightened the grip a voice rang in his ears, that familiar voice he knew so well; speaking the exact same words he'd heard him say when he'd been lying on that damn bed with the drugs in his system, too tired to cry, too dazed to feel. He didn't want to hear any of it, not again, not now...

But the voice still spoke, firm and true as that one time, telling him how sorry he was, how proud he felt and how stupid he'd been for not realizing it before.

Gritting his teeth, Hiccup threw the gun away angrily and buried his face in his hands. His mind got overrun with questions, but he couldn't think straight anymore. Breaths grew frantic as his fingers tugged his hair, not really knowing what to do anymore, a bitter taste in his mouth, chest quivering. He wanted to go home. He wanted everything back so badly; his dad, the gang, his home...

It wasn't always true, about not knowing what you had until you lost it. He knew that all too well, especially after the accident. Only then he understood how important everything really was and how to never take anything for granted.

And now he'd lost all of it.

He should have listened before. He never should have come here in the first place, never should have found out about her...

After he got to steady his breathing a buzzing sound reached his ears and he slowly raised his head in confusion.

"...hey you..." A voice said between the statics through the tank's radio station. He wasn't hallucinating, was he?

"...dumbass..." Nope, still stuck in the real world.

"...yeahâ€"you in the tank..." Hiccup just stared at the radio, a look of disbelief across his face.

That voice... he knew that voice.

"...cosy in there?"

Then he realized it, though he wasn't sure for how long he stayed there gaping like if he'd just zoned out.

It was Jack's voice.

"...look who wants to say hi..." Then barks came through the speaker.

Barks...

A smile lit up his face; he'd recognize them anywhere.

His foot made him trip when he got up in a rush to grab the radio, the sound of the impact resonating over the metal walls, and he banged his head against a pipe that surely wasn't there earlier

before reaching the radio. He couldn't care less about his clumsiness right now, he just let the surge of relief sink in, a huge weight off his heart lifted.

"Hey, hello? Jack?" He finally said.

"There you are... you had me wondering."

"Oh man, I'm glad to hear you. How's Toothless?"

"He's right here, he's fine." A couple of barks reassured him and the cogs of his mind began to turn again.

"Where are you? C-can you see me right now?"

"Oh yeah, I can see you." There was a pause before he heard him let out a breath, "You're surrounded by zombies" that's the bad news."

That was the understatement of the year. Still it got him wondering, "So there's good news?"

"...Nope." Figures...

"Listen," Hiccup began, "now that Toothless is ok I don't mind to tell you I'm a little concerned in here." He said, and his eyes went to the upper entrance, the pounding going non-stop.

His voice tensed through the buzzes. "Oh man, you should see from over here... you'd be having a major freak up."

"Thanks, that's... comforting."

"No problem." Jack countered, and even though he couldn't see him Hiccup knew he had a grin on his face, just like his.

"Alright-alright," he ran a hand through his hair, "got any advice for me?"

Of all the possible things going on in his mind, he definitely didn't expect him to answer, "Yeah... I'd say make a run for it," and he stared at the little radio in his hands with an incredulous look, brows furrowed. Was he serious?

"That's it? Make a run for it?" What a miraculous rescue mission this was going to be.

"Hey, my way's not as dumb as it sounds." Jack answered before he could get another chance to retort. "You've got eyes on the outside here. There's still a bunch of them all around, and I can keep them distracted for a little while but you have to be quick. You with me so far?"

He closed his eyes and let out a sigh. "So far..."

"Okay, the street on the other side of the tank is less crowded. If you move fast, you stand a chance. What do you have on you?"

"Hang on." Hiccup let go of the radio and stumbled back to the

weapons by the dead soldier. The rifle was almost out of ammo and the revolver had three bullets left in. At least he still had the machete and his knife...

After he explained he heard Jack between the buzzes. "Make them count, so I'll be... Hang on..."

"...Jack?"

"...ey... what are...apunzel-n...why...ell..."

"What's going on? Hello?" Hiccup's eyes widened as the radio kept buzzing, only some of Jack's words barely audible in all the interference.

"Hello? Hello?" He tried again to no avail. There was only noise coming out. Deciding to act now he grabbed the blade, tucked the revolver to the small on his back and readied the rifle. When he stood up Jack's voice came through again.

"Can you hear me? Listen... Rapunzel's with the grenadesâ€"don't leave the tank, you hear? Don't leave thâ€" "

Something blew up outside, right next to the tank, and Hiccup managed just in time to brace himself. A few more seconds passed before Jack's voice came through again, "Go! Come on, run!" And he reacted, the cover felt much heavier than before, and he almost slipped down again when he pushed it with a final effort, finally able to get out of there.

After adjusting to the shining white skies above, his eyes widened as he looked down to the streets.

Countless corpses and limbs were sprayed all around; a good portion of burnt asphalt served as proof of the large explosion that occurred just moments ago. Nevertheless, while he stood over the top of the tank the shrieks and infected wandering about reminded him that the streets were still overrun.

When Hiccup dropped to the ground he became the centre of attention. There was a moment of complete (and fairly awkward) silence before they charged at him. He slashed a couple of zombies as he bolted to the other street, rotten limbs flying with each swing, blood spraying all over the place.

When he cut the corner with his blade ready to strike, he suddenly bumped into Jack, the hockey stick firm in his hands ready to attack as well.

"Whoa! Not dead," he half-smiled, though the hint of fear in his expression didn't go unnoticed when a couple of zombies lunged at them from behind, luckily Hiccup reacted in time and slashed the first one's head in half. He was about to drive the machete through the other's eye but stopped to see how it fell when Jack gunned it down with his Uzi. Then a lot more appeared, running and screaming, and they rushed away along the sidewalk.

"Where's Toothless? Where are the others?" Hiccup asked between huffs, and the boy signalled with his stick to the top of a large building a few feet away, torn flags from a dozen countries on the

entrance swinging to an unnoticeable noon breeze, their movements slow and grim, like everything else around them, except for the turmoil of looming death closing in. They turned to an alley and found more in infected running at them. Jack took care of them without delay—alas his stick broke in half when he bashed their heads down, and Hiccup heard him muttering curses as they kept running along the alley. When they found a ladder Jack began to climb immediately. Hiccup stood in front of it with a hesitant look, but he climbed anyway when Jack shouted at him, "What are you doing? Come on!"

After reaching a balcony Jack kicked the ladder down and leaned against the wall to catch a breath. He glared down at the broken stick still in his hands and sighed dropping his shoulders.

When Jack glanced at him and said, "What happened down there?" Hiccup looked down through the gaps of the skywalk at the sea of zombies still trying to get to them. He really hadn't had the chance to fully test out the rubber sole he'd managed to improvise a week ago, and though the shock-absorber spring got most of the job done, the chances of slipping were still there, if not high to say the least. And he didn't feel like explaining all that to him, the climb got him still a bit short of breath, so with a shrug he just simply said, "I'm not such a ladder fan," and he added a little shake of his leg for good measure. Jack caught the gesture and smiled. He sent him lurching forwards with a very hard clap on the back and motioned with his head to a window close by.

Once inside, and after a couple of corridors, they reached a large room, possibly the main one of that floor. As soon as Hiccup set foot in there he fell down again when a certain redhead punched him in the face.

Hard.

"OW—why would you do that?" He yelped when he hit the floor for the hundredth time that day, and he heard Jack muffling a snort. What's up with girl always shoving him around anyway?

"Yeh idiot..."

"Thanks for your concern..." He rubbed the bridge of his nose and glanced up at a fuming Merida with nostrils flared. Once he stood up, well aware of her hands balling into fists and of what was to come, something caught his eye and darted past the girl to the black figure resting by a wall, Rapunzel by its side.

She flinched a bit, not expecting the dog to get up that quick and dive at Hiccup who fell on his knees hugging him, and rushed towards the pair when Toothless staggered down.

"W-what...?" Hiccup's voice cracked as he saw the scars over his friend.

"Don't worry, I've taken care of them... He'll be fine." Rapunzel mumbled and placed a hand on his shoulder. Then she took a piece of red cloth and tied it around a gash on Toothless' back leg firmly. "You should get some rest," she glanced up at Hiccup and smiled, "you look like schei—Ye."

All he could do was give her slow nod and a "Thank you..." And when she stood up he hugged Toothless again, this time carefully, warmly. "_Ekki hafa Æhyggjur fÆlagi, Æg Ætla ekki aÆ lÆta neitt gerast viÆ Æig. Æg lofa_." He whispered and tightened his embrace.

He didn't notice the group smiling in silence behind him, nor the wistful look on Merida's cerulean eyes before she hugged herself and walked off.

* * *

><p>Almost two weeks later - Sunset - Oddly still in the hotel

"Dinner will be ready soon!" Rapunzel announced with her usual cheerfulness, her voice echoing through the main room and along the corridors, and she absentmindedly muttered a low "Comin'..."

She sighed, stretched, slouched and sank deeper into the large sofa she'd declared ownership the first day they came across this place, a snoring Toothless resting by her feet, and she began to roll a stray curl between her fingers. Her eyes moved from the door in front of her, to the ceiling, then the floor, the rosy clouds behind the window, the dog shifting around, and to the door again. A large lethargic yawn left her now wide open mouth and she ran her hands through her wild mop to stifle a groan.

She wasn't bored, and she certainly was not tired, not even after being on the run for nearly a whole week. Now that they weren't hopping from one place to another there was a complete different feeling in the air; it felt... different to say the least, being relatively safe in one place and all. The word boring came to her mind now that she began to ponder about it. Okay, maybe she was a little bored. She just really wanted to listen to some music after all this time, even if the songs turned out to be downright crap, though that didn't matter.

Then the shout ricocheted on the walls and into her ears. "Kerle... come eat DINNER!"

Of course by that she meant just the boiled canned beans of the not-so-successful run Jack had done that morning. He did manage to get some other stuff from here and there though, like one of those old mp3 players with earphones she ended up receiving thanks to the lad's utter, genuine generosity. Alas, it didn't turn on, she thought that perhaps Hiccup would find a way to get it working againâ€"he'd fixed that wee cooker for Rapunzel the other day after all, which had sent the blonde in a cooking frenzy. But right now, the more she stared at the door, the more impatient she grew.

The lad was still locked up in that room with the workbench, probably for hours, and it was getting on her nerves. At first she didn't feel like interrupting, hearing him working about from behind the door seemed to be interesting enough for a while, but now it was just maddening. So with a huff she got up, did her best to avoid the large furry beast and opened the door.

When she went inside the glare turned into an inquisitive look, and then into a mischief-maker grin. A couple of candles were already lit illuminating the room; a sleeping Hiccup with his face on the

workbench; a compass, various tools scattered all around, even more so all over the floor, his new scabbard and leather jacket among some scrap too. At first she considered startling him slamming the door shut, but she decided just to look around and let the lad sleep, she wasn't curious or anything like that.

As she approached him she noticed the side of face was stained along with his green shirt, his back rising up and down as he breathed. Then, just before she was about to wake him up, something else caught her attention.

She grabbed a curious stick that was resting against the side, and ran her hands over the carved marks and steel parts on the wood, following the curve of a metal crook embedded at the end. It was like a razor-sharp ice-pick, only with a long handle. Then she recognized it and her eyes darted from the sleeping boy to the new weapon. This was Jack's hockey stick, the one he always kept close and broke days ago—the _staff_ as he mentioned once. But this was no mere stick anymore; more like an invention of some madman. One would think the lad had mush in his noggin to even think about crafting something of the sort, especially for Jack of all people, if it wasn't for the fact that they _were_ in the very apocalypse. A single crimson drop ran down her finger after she touched the pointy end, landing on a map she hadn't noticed before. It was a map of England with several crosses on many cities and a route marked from Edinburgh to London and a town called Folkestone, it even crossed through DunBroch at one part and the channel to... France...

Then she whirled around surprised when Hiccup woke up with a start, almost falling off of the chair he was sitting on. After his awkward greeting he noticed what she was holding, green eyes shifting from her face to the stick in her hands and she looked down as well.

She didn't really know what to say as they stood there in an uncomfortable silence.

"Sae... Jack's stick huh..." She finally spoke up and met his gaze.

"Yeah," he chuckled nervously rubbing his arm, "I found some stuff the other day and got this idea, so... I made a few tweaks."

"Improved it more like, Hiccup this is..." she placed the stick against the side of the workbench again, pausing to find the right word. "...lethal."

"Er, thanks?" he grinned that crooked smile again and sat down. "Anyway do you need something or...?"

"Oh righ'," she mumbled and gave him the mp3. "Can ye get it t' work?"

With a nod and a yawn Hiccup said, "I've found some batteries one time. They should be around here somewhere..." Then he took the player and began to rummage through all his things. As he lost himself in his element she began to look around, trying not to stare at the way his shoulders moved. When that didn't work she began to study a screwdriver, her hip against the edge of the workbench, but her eyes found their way to something else. Blurry memories of her

family began to downpour and she couldn't help but ask, "Sae... what's in France?"

"What do you mean?" He asked, clearly distracted in screwing open the wee thing.

"The map," She grabbed it and landed a finger on the little notes he made, no one else had such horrible handwriting. "What's all this?"

For some reason her expectant look got him in silence again until he put a battery in the player. "Actually I..." Hiccup began, his hands already fumbling around, but trailed off. She noted how something else ran across his mind when he got up letting out a sigh and picked up the stick. "Come on."

"Bu'â€"Wha' ye doin'?" Then he opened the door and beckoned her to follow.

"There's something I need to tell you guys."

6. The Only Thing

Talking about coming back from the dead...

I thoroughly apologize for this extended period of procrastination. I'm not leaving this story hanging, but I hope y'all know the drill: work, life, projects, exams, archery, a date yada-yada-yada here's nÂ° 6!

Also, holy sh%t them reviews are powerful!

* * *

><p>"...what's the most important thing in this world...?"

Letting out a silent breath Jack pushed open the double doors. As soon as they stepped outside the hotel howls and moans reached his ears. An arrow hissed past him and a zombie fell down while he twirled the staff in his hand, already getting accustomed to the new weight, and tested the metal crook on a couple of heads whose brains flew across the ground. It was harder, sturdier; better to fight if not a little satisfying. Maybe he could use it to climb too... But the faint smirk disappeared from his lips when he glanced up the endless death rummaging at the distance, the morning rays shyly peaking over the clouds and reaching his eyes. A couple more lunged, and he raised his staff again...

"...what does everyone want...?"

The Uzi strapped at his leg was a constant reminder that they had to go through this quiet and slow. No firearms for now, not when there were _this_ many around, only a few scattered zombies that were close enough saw them and attacked. They had to be cautious and stick to the plan, otherwise things could get nasty. Even the dog stayed silent in formation as they advanced through the streets, the distant yet large mass unaware of their presence.

He peeked around his shoulder and saw how Merida yanked off an arrow of a corpse and drove it through another one's eye. It didn't gross him out as much as before, perhaps they've gotten a little numb to it after all this time. Well... maybe not all of them.

Her short breaths as she steeled herself made his eyes focus on her, and he noticed her gritted teeth, the chameleon over her tense shoulders, her blonde hair swinging with her every move, her green eyes fixed forward, and he remembered just how fragile she'd been when he first saw her, pale and shivering from that raging blizzard.

Multiple times he'd joked about her cliché of a weapon not being the most orthodox one to use in moments like this, sometimes the whole group, but she'd simply said that as long as it got the job done it was fine for her, and she'd spin her pan around her finger chuckling while the chameleon glared at him from her shoulder. Actually it proved to be as good as any other weapon, perhaps more when she was the one using it; that didn't mean she didn't look like she was about to throw up every time she caught sight of the guts she often sprayed over the floor after every _clang_.

"...what's the one thing a guy would walk hundreds of miles to get back...?"

He leaned against the wall as the girls fell quiet, the singing of the crickets and roaming of the infected outside pierced through the covered windows and somehow filled the silence as they stared at Hiccup, the dog sitting as his right with the same forlorn air. It wasn't usual for him to be this silent, all this stuff got him lost for words.

Honestly he did not see this coming, especially after everything they'd gone through all this time together. Tough now that he thought about it, he wasn't sure of how much time had passed, not that he really cared when most of it was spent running and scavenging, or running and fighting, or running and climbing, or just plain running. Sometimes it felt like there was no end to this at all.

Merida's once narrowed eyes and stern look softened, already knowing the answer. Even with the weak light of the candles that distant, knowing look in her eyes was unmistakable, and she averted her gaze down before Rapunzel whispered the answer almost to herself.

"...we've all made mistakes, done things that we regret..."

"So far so good," Hiccup breathed by his right slashing one in half with his now stained blade.

"Speak for yourself." Jack said with a smirk and impaled another zombie, "You okay there Punz?"

"I'm fine" "I'm fine..." She waved a hand dismissively as they cut a corner, her nose twitching a little, and reached a conveniently not overrun street. After some slow, paranoid steps he heard someone sniffing and from the corner of his eye he caught sight of her mouth opening... ever... so... slowly...

Even if he knew what was to come the high-pitched sneeze still made

him flinch and the rest turned to a Rapunzel gritting her teeth, cheeks pink.

"...bless you." Jack whispered with a slight shake of his head. For some reason everything fell quiet after that, deathly quiet, and they carefully turned around in fear of the worst.

But the horde didn't notice them.

A loud scream broke the silence, though it wasn't the usual one full of rage they'd all come to recognize, this one was far worse, filled with horror and panic.

"What the..." Merida breathed and hopped on a trashed car, her cerulean eyes searching across the sea of infected.

"NO! HELP ME!" The voice screamed again, and her face turned to the street they'd been seconds ago.

"What's going on? What do you see?" Hiccup asked.

"PLEASE! OH GOD!"

"It's a girl..." was all she said, her expression unreadable.

"Was?!" Rapunzel hissed.

He hopped on as well and his eyes widened when he found a woman a couple of blocks away from them. Despite the distance he saw her stained clothes, her dark hair, the way she flailed around in panic trying to escape the infected chasing her to no avail. "She's surrounded."

"PLEASE!"

"We have to do something!" Rapunzel's green eyes darted between the other three fearfully. "We have to help her!" They all shared the same look of worry except for Merida who just stood there watching the scene unfold.

"You do know that's suicide, right?" He asked gesturing to Hiccup with the staff.

"Yes but that's not whatâ€" "

"But Hiccup, something could happen." Rapunzel began to fumble with a stray golden lock.

"I know," he ran a hand through his hair. "Look, I'm forever in debt to you guys, I truly am. But this is something that I just have to do."

"Yeah, jus' go and kill yerself, prove the world yer ae madman." Merida crossed her arms, and when she glared at the wall she muttered. "No' that yer a man..."

"And what if they're dead?" Jack blurted. He didn't mean to sound as if he'd spat the words, it just happened. _

But Hiccup shook his head and looked at him in the eyes. "You don't know that."

And neither did he.

"But still..." Rapunzel timidly began only to be interrupted with a huff from a certain redhead.

"Unbelievable!" She whirled around in a flash of red and stormed towards him, hands balled into fists. "Yer talkin' as if yeh don't have any say in it!"

"Well maybe I don't!" He glared back and motioned with his hands. "A-and besides, why is this so important to you all of a sudden? It's not like we haveâ€" "

"Because this is insaene, that's why!" She jabbed a finger at his chest, her voice growing in volume. "It's nae enough to do stupid and crazy oh no, ye jus' have to do insaene now. Wha' makes ye think ye will even make it!? Wha' about Toothless!? Yeh think yeh two alone will jist survive off like tha'!? And wha' if you get there then?! Wha' makes ye think they're notâ€" "

"Stop!" Hiccup finally snapped and grabbed her hand in his, the Scott's glare fading at the sudden contact. His eyes were locked with hers until he dropped his gaze, but didn't let go of her hand. "Just... stop."

He wasn't sure how to take all this yelling between the two, but from the look in her green eyes he realized that she was probably thinking about her family; or just her mother for that matter as she had mentioned once, a long time ago actually.

It's not like he wasn't familiar with the feelingâ€"on the contrary, he'd learned to hide it years ago when he felt just as alone in the world as they were nowâ€"but the only thing that his brain could come up with was to place a hand over her shoulder in a pathetic attempt of comfort. But when she looked up to him and a corner of her lips turned, he didn't feel as the messed up guy that he was, though he knew that smile had been forced.

A heavy sigh made their heads turn to Hiccup before he spoke up again.

"...every time we step outside, we risk our lives..."

The screams were drawing more and more zombies towards her, like an injured animal calling for help only to attract more starving wolves.

"We cannae do anythin'. There's no gettin' to her."

"What?" Jack turned to face her with a look of incredulity plastered on his face, and saw a glimmer of something in her eyes, like a bad memory...

_ "OH GOD! OH GOD!"_

"We gotta do something!" Hiccup interjected, "Toothless, stay backâ€" " But as soon as he walked forward Merida jumped down and

stopped him

"...we try to stay hidden, we risk our lives..."

"Don't!" she grabbed his shoulder. "She's bit, I've seen i'... w-we can't!"

"And leave her to die like that! She's not live bait!" He exclaimed gesturing with his hands.

Those words were as hard as they were true. The infected hadn't noticed them yet, and if they let her alive she'd keep being the centre of attention (though it wouldn't be for long), and thus, would buy them time. Yet it was sickening to be even thinking about it.

"SOMEBODY HELP ME!"

"...hell, nowadays we even breathe, and we risk our lives..."

"We're not like that." He argued hopping down at last, both hands gripping the staff tightly.

"I _know_â€" _I kno'ow_" Merida hissed, her eyes slowly dropping to the ground.

Jack shot a glance at the moving horde and faced the group; Rapunzel was biting her lower lip, knowing what was to happen but afraid to speak her mind. "We have to put her out of her misery." He said and offered his staff to Hiccup who nodded silently and handed him the rifle.

"...every moment now, we never have a choice..."

Moments like these were the ones that made him hear his own heart pounding.

He hopped on the wreckage again and took in a long breath, the moving clouds blocked out the sun over his eyes and gave him a clearer view, it wasn't going to last though. He scanned the herd, aimed at the screaming girl and without pondering about it pulled the trigger.

The shot surely gave away their presence, and he knew they had to leave.

But he stood still.

It wasn't impotence that kept him from reacting, nor the shock of realizing he just killed a human being, but the lack of it. He saw how a hundred hands dug into her flesh and ripped her open, how her limbs were torn apart in the massive feeding frenzy, how a small group was now moving towards them. Everything seemed to slow down.

So it was true.

He'd gotten a little numb to it after all.

The sun appeared again and forced him to narrow his eyes. There was nothing more they could do now. He dropped down and handed the gun back, his eyes betraying more than he'd want.

"Run." Though he doesn't say it, they all knew what he meant with that single nod.

Time was running out.

And so they ran away, no one casted an occasional quick glance behind them, no one dared. They kept going for a good amount of blocks until the mass of infected was nothing more than a blur in the distance and a bad memory.

It was a surprise no one followed them.

"...the only thing we can choose is what we're risking it for..."

Even though they were in the open Hiccup looked to and fro to make sure it was clear, and was the first to plunge down by the sidewalk before sheathing the blade and resting his arms on his knees.

"Well this day's been uplifting." He mumbled and put a hand over Toothless' forehead. The dog let out a small whine and leaned against his side while the others sat down.

"Yeah..." Jack stretched his legs and hung his head back for a while; even with the heels of his hands pressed against his eyes the image of the girl was still there, and he looked up and about to at least try and avert his thoughts.

A breeze twirled around above them, like a childish whim completely ignorant of what was to come, its deep whistle blending in with the shaking of the infinite leaves of all the trees from around. Behind them large clouds passed by, colossal pillars soaring.

"...and just hang on a little bit longer..."

It was going to rain... again.

"Oh, wait..." Rapunzel mumbled and reached out for the dog, one arm stretched in front of him and the other resting her weight over his left knee.

Toothless looked at her with wide eyes, tilted his head to the side and let his tongue out to dangle freely. Then as she stretched her hand towards him he took off in a sudden black blur, which ended up in her letting out a yelp and beginning to chase him around.

"Hey! Would youâ€"settle down...?" She groaned, though a small smile was playing on her face, "Toothless! _Lass mal sehen!_"

"Punzie," Jack smirked at the way they skipped about and how the dog was practically challenging her, and chuckled when they darted past Merida almost knocking her down, Pascal holding on for dear life. "What are you doing?"

"I just want toâ€"ugh, want to take the rag offâ€"_Hab dich!_ Oh_, komm schon..."

"Good luck with that." He chuckled with a twirl of his staff and took out a bottle filled with rainwater from the backpack.

"Hold up. Bud..." Hiccup patted his lap and the dog quickly halted at his side. "Now try it."

She blew a golden lock off her forehead and knelt down in front of Toothless. "Okay." But this time, when she was just inches away from the red cloth a low growl made her yank her hand away. Everybody looked at the dog in surprise, its greenish eyes fixed on her slim fingers. "_Was?_" She mouthed but tried again, and again the same low growl stopped her.

"Toothless..." Hiccup scowled to which the dog only looked at him. They stood there for a split second, as if they were reading each other's minds, before his eyes widened and a smile crept at the corner of his lips.

"What's the matter with 'im?" Merida asked, cerulean eyes darting between the two.

"He wants to keep it."

"What?" Rapunzel tilted her head and stared with a clearly confused countenance as he began to stroke Toothless' side, his thumb drawing circles over the dark fur.

"Well, look at that..." Jack breathed and leaned forwards to pass the bottle to the red head.

"Why?" Rapunzel stretched her hand again, though this time she began to pat his snout.

"He's like that I suppose. You should've seen him fighting with my dad for the couch the morning I found him. He'd really never approved of pets." Hiccup shook his head. "But then he changed, we all did... He even got Toothless to visit me in the hospital."

"Must be a great man..." He said, a sudden wistfulness falling over him.

"Great would be an understatement, I'd use the word huge personally. But... yes." They all smiled and allowed for a peaceful silence to fill what little quiet time they had left for the day, and he allowed his eyes to wander around again to the clouds, the buildings, the trees, the street, Pascal on her shoulder, her hair, her neck, her eyes, his feet...

"Wha'?'_" Merida asked after Hiccup's dry laugh.

"I-I still don't get it." He looked at them with a light frown. "Why would you want to come?"

"Are you kidding me, after that long ass speech last night, really?"

"It's just that... not every day you hear somebody wants to go with you in a crazy," he gestured with his hands for the twelfth time, "apocalyptic-backpack trip around Europe."

"Hiccup," Rapunzel began, "we've already told you why. It's our choice." In fact Merida had been the one who decided that. The plan was to travel together to find their families and then part ways as unlikely friends: Merida would reunite with her filthy rich family in that bunker or whatever metal box they were in below Paris, Rapunzel would go back home to her mother and Hiccup would carry on from there to his wet heap of rock in the middle of nowhere.

And Jack, well... he had a completely different reason to go.

"...I don't want to survive just to survive..."

"Yeh can be very persuasive sometimes did ye know tha' ye dork?" Merida rubbed her mouth with her sleeve. "Anywa'ay, how are we goin' to get out of th' city?"

But before he could answer she held up a finger and added, "No' walkin' please."

"Actually no, we'll just have to find a car, preferably a van... for supplies and stuff. We'd have to take the gas out of some cars, that shouldn't be much of a problem; we only need a normal hose."

"Pizza delivery anybody?" Jack pocketed his free hand and casually pointed the staff at a yellow van parked at the far end of the block. Believe it or not it was perfect: it turned on, it wasn't so damaged, there was a lot of space inside and it even had some fuel left; even with all the scratches the words _"Pizza Planet" _were still recognizable on the side, though what really caught his attention was the little rocket attached at the top.

"...I'm doing this for them..."

"I drive!" Jack declared after they opened the trunk and literally threw the bags in.

"Yeh of all people! Ohh no, there's nae way the yeti is drivin'."

"Hey, I found it!"

"Daesnae matter."

"Yes it does!"

"Nae i' doesn't. And yeh don't even drive from th' righ' side!"

"That doesn't matter!"

"Okay!" Rapunzel interjected holding up her hands, "No need to get too loud and bring more friends. Why don't we solve this the civilized way, hm?"

He huffed. "...fine."

_ "...that's reason enough to risk mine..."_

_"What bollocks..." _She muttered.

Of all the possible things, he had to lose at Rock-Paper-Scissors; apparently a lifetime playing it wasn't enough. Well... at least he called shotgun first.

From the corner of his eyes he saw how Merida kept muttering under her breath from the backseat between the dog and the blonde. When her glare landed on him he smirked, though it disappeared when she mouthed some quite rude words at him. Luckily he didn't have to fear for his safety when a little giggle escaped her.

"So..." Hiccup took out his journal from his jacket pocket—the term diary would be far more accurate in Jack's opinion—and unfolded a quite large roadmap of England from it. "From here we'd have to find a way out to the M20, drive till we reach Folkestone and if I'm not mistaken through the channel tunnel to Calais."

"The underwater one?" Rapunzel popped up from the behind.

"Yup," Hiccup pointed at the red line that cut across the English Channel. "Shouldn't take too long; a couple of hours maybe." He passed the map over to her and started the engine. "Alright, no turning back now... Are you sure you still want to do this?"

"_Ja._" Rapunzel nodded, Pascal chirping from her shoulder.

"We already said _yes_ Hiccup!" Merida narrowed her eyes at him playfully.

"What about you Jack?"

He glanced at the group, his thumb caressing the staff between him and the door, and grinned.

"I'm in."

7. Touch the Sky

A/N: "I'm not leaving this story hanging" -doesn't update for months.

_Sorry about that one, hehehe—| so—| um—| yeah—| "sighs"

>Alright. These little pieces were supposed to be the beginning of ch. 7 but I know I won't have enough time for the 4k words I generally like until (buoyantly) the last weeks of December. I've had this idea in my mind for a long time; this one is very short yes, but is heavy on the tension and background side (and acts as a little seed that will grow up like a baobab on a little planet and tear everything down, even that bitchy rose, if you know what I mean). I know it's a bit confusing—as most of my crap—but it will move the plot forward in the future chapters.
_

_Also I want to answer a couple of Qs from you awesome guests reviewers: Yes, this will have romance and those ships sailing around the harbour y'all like so much, and I plan to go deep with them, just not right now. Yes, the Frozen group will play a role (and other characters too), though they'll probably appear when the group reaches Denmark and Norway; I have more of a

minor-side-but-still-interesting-plot with them to be honest, but hey! Cameos!
>

Anyway, here it goes. This just gives some background for a certain character-sorry again for such a short piece-(imagine it's the part before the dunuh-nuh-nuh-nuh-nuh music thingy takes over)_ Read it slowly to get the taste!_

* * *

><p>There she saw her, standing pale and cold under the gloomy light. Like a ghost, hovering ever so fragile, it seemed that she could vanish into the very air she was breathing, and escape away from all.<p>

But this wasn't her.

This girl painted before her was staring dead centre into her own eyes, motionless and empty, dark rings beneath them.

Tentatively she lifted a slim hand, perhaps afraid of breaking the spell, or of being trapped in her own dream. Her thumb caressed the crystal and she realised this wasn't fantasy. She was here between the walls of this little room and the covering sound of falling water. Yet knowing that her solitude wouldn't last long, she was determined to take advantage of what time she had; it was like a treasure too dangerous to be revealed. Perhaps they were already gone, perhaps it was time...

_ '__Fate' _

She broke out in goose pimples and wet her lips...

Her eyes fell down to the marble washbasin while her hand began to slither towards her pocket.

Three knocks on the wooden door made her flinch, and despite knowing the door was locked she moved her hand away.

"Merida, are you here?" Her mother's voice came muffled from behind the door.

"Yes Mum..." She managed to speak without the trembling fear of being caught. Not that she cared, but still...

"We're leaving now." The tone of her voice was still as regal as it had been yesterday, and she frowned remembering every bit of the fight, how she spat the words, how she yanked the pendant and threw it at the floor bitterly, how she hoped it would break, how satisfied she felt at the flash of hurt in her mother's eyes and how her cheek stung.

"Fine, Mum." She answered solemnly. _"Just fine..."_

Beyond the noise of the shower there was a screaming silence between them after she muttered those words, and her frown didn't leave her until she heard her mother's steps disappearing. She didn't care about the meeting, even if it was in Paris or if it was about her country, it didn't matter now; the last thing she wanted was to waste

time alongside that woman. She didn't care about anything at all.

Damn her...

The itch rose again, and this time she was certain that there weren't going to be any more interruptions.

She knew how to control itâ€"she wasn't an idiot, she wasn't weak. But sometimes, even now, she needed this, to let the anger out, to feel _free_ if just for a bit.

Damn her...

She sat on the toilet and rolled up her sleeve while pushing her hair over her far shoulder. With her teeth she adjusted her belt around the arm tightly, the taste of leather and pines staining her tongue, and took the syringe from her pocket. A few of drops to the floor took off the air remaining inside.

The alcohol and the cold needle against her skin made her betray a shiver before she found the vein, took in a deep breath and entered the steel.

Her hand clenched into a fist as the other applied steady pressure to the syringe, pushing her fate inside. She gritted her teeth through the process, only a few more seconds of the cold spreading through her arm and then she would escape.

Damn her... damn her...

Her breaths became slow, her body weightless. Her hair was like fire, radiating warmth and shining like the sun above the green trees. There were faint echoing moans ringing in her ears, playful and soothing, like the whispers of her brothers.

She didn't know how much time had passed until she stood up from the rock and began to pace through the shaded path, a distant stream's song playing along the sizzling of dry leaves under her bare feet, until she reached a glade. In its midst a circle of great standing stones stretched high and dark into the mist; but her eyes were fixed on another sight. A large mirror stood in the core of the circle under a ray of moonlight, and she was drawn closer and closer by a force she felt vibrating through the air and taking control of her being. There were whorls and spirals flourishing over the reflections, immaterial images rose and sank with every peaceful second.

Tentatively she lifted a slim hand and her thumb caressed the crystal. It trembled, fluttered and morphed in myriad images only to subside and reveal a solid yet ethereal silhouette.

There she saw her, standing pale and cold under the gloomy light. She was like a ghost, hovering ever so fragile, as if she could vanish into the very air she was breathing...

She was staring dead centre into her own motionless and empty eyes, dark rings beneath. Inside them there was something else, something new: a flickering blue flame, just like one of a dying fire yet pulsing and moving like a living creature...

...beckoning her to follow.

End
file.